






1908.

To John S. Terry,  
from  
Walter Wharton.

Christmas, 1908.



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# THE YOUNG DITCH RIDER

A STORY OF THE PLAINS.



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## CHAPTER I.

HARRY PURCELL reined in his pony on the embankment and looked disappointedly into the ditch. It was as dry as a powder-horn.

"There can't have been much of a rise," was his thought. "The water ought to have been here before now."

The buffalo-grass plains were about him, the sun blazed down on him from a cloudless sky, and a hot south wind fanned his cheeks. He could hear the wind as well as feel it. It soughed suggestively across the gray expanses and

sang among the clods at his pony's feet. It was a sapless, dessicating wind, whose breath meant ruin to the crops unless an abundant flow of water could speedily be obtained.

Harry Purcell was the "ditch-rider" for the Golconda Irrigation and Development Company. This company, tapping the upper Arkansas with its main canal, led the water out upon the high uplands known as the "flats," where, by a series of smaller canals, it was distributed to the farmers.

The season was an exceptionally dry one. It was now near the end of June and there had been no rain since early in April. Worse still, the river was so low that there was not enough water for irrigating purposes; and the farmers, whose crops were withering, alternated between despair at the ruin they foresaw and anger against the "ditch" company, at whose door they laid most of their misfortunes.

Harry Purcell's duties were so onerous



that he was usually in the saddle from daylight till dark. His work of "riding the ditch" required him to inspect the embankments, dams and water-gates along more than thirty miles of canals and laterals. In addition, he was expected to placate the grumblers, distribute the water justly and impartially, and prevent water-stealing. Certainly this was enough work, and more than enough work, for a boy of seventeen.

Harry had ridden to the head of the ditch the day before, and had been led to believe, by the appearance of the water in the river, that the long-hoped-for spring rise was at hand. This rise, which usually comes late in May or early in June, is not brought about by rainfall, but by the melting of snow in the mountains. As soon as the season is sufficiently advanced the snows melt in the high gorges and the water is poured into the stream from a thousand sources. Bursting through the Grand Cañon, that mighty cleft in the great eastern barrier of the Rockies, the Arkansas flows out in a muddy flood across the thirsty plains of Eastern Colorado and Western Kansas, where hundreds of miles of irrigating canals distribute the bulk of it over cultivated fields, and rob the demon Drouth of its terrors.

The young ditch-rider looked earnestly up the ditch, whose brown embankments, rising like ridges upheaved by gigantic moles, ran in parallel zigzags toward the

southwest. To the southward and across the river the grass-covered sand-hills thrust up their tousled heads. To the westward and northward and eastward rose houses and "shacks," with windmills wheeling on airy towers; and stacks of hay and grain, kept over from the previous summer, evidencing the fatness of the land. Just across the ditch a saucy prairie dog, upreared on the edge of its hole, barked impudently, while other prairie dog mounds were visible farther away.

The look of disappointment deepened into one of anxiety. Among those vitally interested in the coming of the water, the young ditch-rider numbered his mother and himself; for Mrs. Purell had a "proved-up" pre-emption farther up the ditch, with a number of acres of grain, alfalfa and sorghum growing on it.

Harry Purcell drew his pony back from the embankment and rode on across the unfenced country, unmindful of the hot south wind and the burning sun. His earnest face was as brown as a nut; his wide-brimmed white hat, held in place by a cord that passed loosely behind his head, flared and flapped; the huge wooden stirrups rose and fell; the tail of his short coat snapped in the breeze. As the buckskin pony bounded on in a rocking canter, shying around a badger hole now and then, the young ditch-rider, sitting with Western firmness in the deep saddle, certainly presented an attractive picture.

The buckskin was so intelligent an animal, with such a knowing look in its eyes, that Harry had often tried to picture what its life must have been before it came into his possession.

For one thing it had been owned by an Indian, as was shown by the brand burned on its hip. That brand rudely represented a bow and arrow and a buffalo. That the bow and arrow were as large as the buffalo only evidenced the lack of skill or the peculiar taste of the Indian artist.

It had as evidently escaped from its Indian owner, for it had been caught from a wild herd on the banks of the Canadian, by Kansas horse-hunters, who had re-subjugated it by means of their cruel "breaking" chains, whose scars still showed on its forelegs. From these horse-hunters Harry had bought it.

A change of the ditch's direction brought into view a house that was a cross between a "shack" and a "dug-out" — a rough, shanty-like structure, half above ground, and half underground in cellar fashion. This was the home of Richmond Baily. "Old Baily," nearly everybody called him; and so Harry thought of him, though he always took good care to address the irascible farmer as "Mr. Baily."

As Baily's came within the field of vision, there was again a tightening of the rein, though the pony was not brought to a full halt; and the teeth of the young

ditch-rider closed with a click of sudden suspicion.

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit if old Baily's got the water turned into his fields!"

From the first there had been ill-will between the Bailsys and Purcells; and, when Harry had secured the position of ditch-rider, Baily had been prompt to question his fitness for the place and to hint suggestively that Mrs. Purcell would no doubt now raise good crops even if no one else did.

Coming to the ears of the Purcells this did not incline them to think more kindly of Mr. Baily. As for Mrs. Baily, she was never much taken into account by anyone, and less so by her husband. She was a sickly woman, who was almost a nonentity in her own home and everywhere else.

But there was one member of the Baily family against whom no bitter or cross-grained word was ever uttered. That was little Elsie, a bright-haired creature of eight — the angel of the household.

As Harry Purcell again set the pony in motion and rode toward Baily's, there came back to him, in all its details, the recollection of the beginning of the ill-feeling that had separated the families. Both Mr. Baily and Mrs. Purcell had wanted the same pre-emption. A Golden City land agent and locator had called Mrs. Purcell's attention to it, and she had employed him to drive her son and her-

self out to the land that they might make the beginning of the "improvements" demanded by the law, which, in practice, was usually no more than the shoveling of a few spadefuls of earth, or the laying of a so-called "foundation" for a house.

As it chanced, Mr. Bailly had been driven out from Golden City the same day, by a rival locator, who intended to place him on that identical pre-emption. The object of each party becoming known to the other, the result was a wild race across the trailless plains, in which Mrs. Purcell won.

The fact that the victor was a widow did not seem to alter Mr. Bailly's feelings on the subject. The defeat and the loss of the land made him bitter. He took, as the next best, the pre-emption adjoining it on the east; and shortly afterward moved his family there and went to raising cattle and farming.

But he was far from being a good neighbor, the Purcells thought. He did not closely watch his cattle and they more than once devoured Mrs. Purcell's crops. Though warned that young sorghum and damp green alfalfa were especially hurtful to cattle, Bailly paid no heed; and one morning four of his finest cows were dead from alfalfa bloat, as the result of trespassing in the Purcell alfalfa field.

It taught him a lesson, but it increased his dislike for the Purcells.

Bailly was one of the heaviest farmers, and had contracted for enough water to

irrigate a hundred acres. That allowed him a water-gate aperture ten inches high and ten inches wide; or one hundred inches of water, flowing through the gate under what is technically known as a "four-inch pressure." It was Harry Purcell's duty, when the water was running, to open each gate to the limit allowed by the farmer's water contract and to lock it there; but no one else was privileged to do this.

Harry knew, however, that in some instances duplicate keys had been procured, and locks broken, and even ditches boldly cut with the spade, to bring about an increase in the flow.

"Bailly's mean enough to steal every inch of water in the ditch, if he believed no one would catch him at it!" was his thought, as the pony galloped on in that easy, tireless way that takes the true Western pony so rapidly over the ground and enables it to accomplish such distances.

Harry did not stop to consider how unjust to Mr. Bailly this reflection might be, until he rode into the fenceless fields and up to the ditch in front of the house and saw that the ditch was as dry at that point as it was further down.

Bailly, who was engaged in splicing a string of barbed wire on his cattle corral, using an old wagon wheel as a wire stretcher, abandoned his task and shuffled across to where the young ditch-rider had halted.



"I think it's a shame!" he declared, his face mantling. "Here I haven't had a drop of water since I don't know when, and ain't likely to have, seems like!"

Elsie, who had been playing with a shepherd puppy, left her rough playmate and followed her father, coming to a halt a few feet behind him. As her father talked, she stared up at Harry with her wondrous blue eyes, that seemed so like bits out of the Kansas sky, and threw back, with a sunburned little hand, the bright hair that the brisk wind persisted in tossing into her face.

"You told me there'd be water down to-day!" Baily said.

"I told you I thought there would be," Harry corrected. "And I'm surprised that it isn't here before this."

"Don't see why you should be!" Baily snapped. "Your company expects to git rich without spending a cent. They ought to lengthen that dam."

Harry tried to apologize for the company's shortcomings.

"The snows are slow to melt this season. I expected the water to-day. I'll ride up to the river again and see what's the matter. There may be some trouble at the dam."

"And I'll go 'long with you!" said Baily, stepping toward the sod stable to bring out his pony.

The tone and manner were nagging in the extreme, and at any time Harry

would much have preferred Mr. Baily's room to his company.

"Look at that wheat!" Baily grumbled, as he swung into the saddle and they set out together. "Yellow as a pumpkin and chinch-bugged till you kin smell it to town and back. It won't cut five bushels to the acre; and if this thing keeps up it won't even pay to run a harvester over it. Water on that ground in March would have made it. And the river was running bank full then!"

The young ditch-rider did not want an argument and remained silent. Besides, there was much truth in the statement.

"'Stead o' conductin' things in a business-like way, you fellers was tinkerin' 'long, tryin' to make a nickel's worth of work cover a dollar's worth of need. The water that might have been had, run on down to the gulf; and then, when it was all gone, you sent out notices that the ditches was ready and that you was in condition to make contracts."

"You farmers can't hold yourselves entirely blameless, Mr. Baily," Harry declared, no longer able to restrain his opinions. "You held back from making contracts, hoping for a rainy season, thinking if it came you could get along without ditch water; and at the same time you knew that the Golconda Company needed the money it could have borrowed on your water notes, for the purpose of putting the ditches and dam in order. It couldn't get the money, and it couldn't

do the work in time. Perhaps it didn't try hard enough. But you should be willing to share the responsibility."

But the young ditch-rider found, as he had found before, that an argument with Mr. Baily was a mere waste of words.

Neither was in good temper when the Purcell pre-emption was reached. The old bitterness of feeling rankled anew, and Harry felt especially hurt by certain hints thrown out by the old farmer to the effect that matters would not now be so bad if the ditch-rider had always done his duty.

Harry dismounted in front of his humble home, drew the rein over the pony's head, that it might trail on the ground and keep the trained pony from straying, and ran into the house to speak a word with his mother.

Baily did not dismount, but rode across the unfenced alfalfa field that lay west of the house, and on to the bend of the ditch where Harry had set his mother's water-gate.

As Harry came out he saw Baily swing to the ground at the gate and stoop down as if to examine it. Then Harry mounted and galloped toward him, going around the field instead of straight across it.

He was almost to the ditch before he discovered what had drawn Baily's attention. Then he fairly reeled in the saddle, while a dizzying sense of astonishment and uncertainty overwhelmed him.

His mother's water-gate was wide open! The expected rise had come and the main canal was half full; but the open water-gate was draining the entire flow into the Purcell alfalfa field! What did it mean?

Dashing his heels against the pony's flanks, Harry sent it on with quick bounds until it reached the point occupied by Baily. Then he saw that the water-gate was not only open, but that it was locked open, and that the usual dam—a board backed with sod and earth—had been placed across the canal for the purpose of diverting into the field all the water the canal might contain. The full extent of the damaging discovery rendered him almost speechless.

Harry looked anxiously and puzzledly at the irate old man, who now faced him like an accusing angel. Who could have opened the water-gate in that manner? This was the question Harry asked himself, and which received no reply.

"No more'n I expected!" Baily snarled. "I've said from the first that the Purcell crops wouldn't never go beggin' for water! You didn't think I'd come round by this bend; but you see I did!"

"Stop that, Mr. Baily!" Harry commanded, anger quivering up through his amazement. "I never opened that gate!"

Then he saw that the old farmer was fairly shaking with rage.

"I've no more idea how this thing hap-

pened than you have. I didn't do it; and I'm sure mother didn't!"

As he paused from his exertions, Baily was climbing slowly into the saddle.

Baily stared disbelievingly. "Who else would want to do it? Who else

"I'd like a little o' that water, thank ye, and will ride back home to be ready



"Answer me that!"

would have any reason to? Answer me that!"

Harry did not stop to reply. He leaped down and hastily tore out the obstructing dam; then, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he unlocked and lowered the gate.

fer it when it comes. I reckon you'll go right on down and set the gates, now?"

"Yes," said Harry, his thoughts all awlirl. "I'll come right on down. But you mustn't think that I opened this gate; for, on my honor, I didn't!"

Baily galloped away without replying;



and Harry Purcell, leaving his mother's gate tightly closed, confusedly mounted the buckskin pony and splashed inquiringly across the alfalfa field, where the water stood four and five inches deep.

There could be no doubt that the upper portion of the alfalfa field was secure for a time against the effects of the drouth and hot winds. The black soil was a perfect muck, into which the pony sunk to the fetlocks. The gate must have been open for hours.

Harry looked over the field with deep concern. The fact that the alfalfa was safe gave him pain instead of pleasure. Other fields were withering for lack of the water that had soaked into this soil, and it had been made his duty to see that they got their share. How was he to explain away this piece of apparently criminal selfishness? How was he to establish his innocence in the eyes of his neighbors?

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## CHAPTER II.

### BAILY BECOMES AGGRESSIVE.



BECAME clear to the mind of Harry Purcell that the water-gate had been opened by some one who desired to injure him in the eyes of the ditch patrons. Who that enemy was, only time and the run of events could de-

cide. His present duty was to ride down the ditch and make the gates ready to receive the water.

However, no great haste was required. The water filled the dry ditch slowly enough. It would take nearly an hour's time for it to reach Baily's.

Therefore, he turned homeward, anxious to talk the matter over with his mother, and yet shrinking from acquainting her with his startling discovery.

Mrs. Purcell came out of the door as he neared the house. She had seen Baily ride furiously away; and Harry's return, after he had announced his intention of going to the river, told her something was wrong. She saw the look of pain and annoyance on her son's face, and her own sympathetic countenance reflected it.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"We found the gate wide open when we went up there and a dam in the ditch. The upper end of the alfalfa is all afloat. It must have been running since in the night, by the looks of it."

Mrs. Purcell, who had been wiping her hands on her apron, contracted her fingers in a sudden spasm within its folds.

"Why, how — who opened it?" she faltered.

"I only wish I knew! Mr. Baily's hopping mad, of course; and I don't know as I can blame him. He thinks I did it to steal the water!"

"Oh, Harry!"

Mrs. Purcell could not at the moment

say more — did not need to say more — to express the fullness of her feelings; but her eyes brimmed with tears, and Harry noticed that when she smoothed down the apron her hands shook.

"I told him I didn't, but I could see he wouldn't believe me; and I reckon there can't be any doubt he'll repeat it all around, and be glad of the opportunity!"

"You must tell him again that you didn't do it, Harry! Be careful how you approach him, though! I don't suppose it could have been the work of one of the Carmon boys? They don't like you, you know!"

Harry ran his fingers thoughtfully through the pony's mane.

"I don't believe that either Ike or Joe would do a trick like that. They might meet me in the middle of the road and knock me down, but they're not underhanded."

"Well, my son, do not let us be discouraged or unhappy over this, although it does look very dark. You have the support of your own conscious integrity; the undoubting faith of your mother in your honesty of purpose and action; and you pray daily 'Deliver us from evil.' Can you not trust the Master to answer your prayer?"

"I will try, mother, but it is very hard to bear suspicion when one is innocent."

"Far easier, my son, than if you were guilty, for then you would have not only

the reproach of men, but your own conscience to add to your misery. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.'"

"Well, I've shut off all the water, and now I'm going down to open Baily's gate. I'll be careful what I say to him," as he saw her lips opening again in warning.

Then he clattered away across the dusty trail, and on through the buffalo grass, which was as dry in that month of June as if cured for hay.

Baily had his team out and was plowing some furrows across his wheat field, to draw the water and cause it to spread more rapidly when it came. He did not come up to the water-gate; and, when it had been set and locked, Harry rode on down the ditch toward the other farms, relieved that he had an excuse for not approaching the cross-grained old farmer.

There were many places to visit and many gates to set, weary miles to be traversed, and many men with many grievances to encounter. Harry did his work faithfully and well, glad to assure the settlers that the long-expected rise was at hand. But to none of them did he find courage to speak of the opened water-gate, though he felt sure an uncharitable account of it would soon be poured into their ears.

When he returned home the afternoon was far spent. The mid-day meal, long kept warm for him, had grown cold. Before eating it he rode to the gate which



he had so tightly locked, set it to the proper limit, and turned the water into the lateral that led to the wheat. All the farmers on that line of ditch were receiving their stipulated flow and the ditch was brimming. He saw no good reason why the work of an enemy should cause his mother's crops to be stinted now.

His mother went into the field with him after dinner, and together they worked till dark in their efforts to lead the water over as much ground as possible. When they were forced to stop by reason of the darkness, Harry left the water running into the lateral, as he had a right to do, and in the morning was gratified to find that more than two-thirds of the field had been satisfactorily covered.

Though the work of irrigating was too hard for a woman, Mrs. Purcell continued it through that day and the next; while Harry rode the ditch, helping her an hour or so at a time as he found opportunity.

The farmers were in better spirits. It seemed that, after all, the crops would not be a failure. The wheat and oats would be short, but much might yet be done with this productive soil; and, though the hot winds still blew, their power to harm was stayed.

The second morning, when Harry went into the alfalfa field, which still needed water along its lower slopes, he found the water-gate again locked wide open, as on

that first occasion. He looked about, hoping to find a clue to the perpetrator of the wrong, but saw only some tracks, that had probably been made the previous day by his own wading-boots.

He went back to the house much perturbed and told his mother of his discovery.

"I'm going to watch that field to-night! I've shut off the water, and maybe the fellow will come back and try it again. It's some one who wants to injure me. Who is our greatest enemy, mother?" He looked her straight in the face. "I believe it has been in your thought for some time, just as it's been in mine, that it may have been the work of Mr. Bailly!"

"I'm afraid we do him wrong, though!" she protested. "You won't hint it to anybody?"

"No; but I'm going to watch the field to-night."

A thought of the danger he might incur flashed on her and made her endeavor, somewhat feebly, to dissuade him from his purpose; but he was firm in his determination.

It was past midnight when he entered the field. He had sat by the west window a long time watching the field by the light of the moon. Now the moon had gone down. But in that dry, thin atmosphere the stars shone with wondrous brilliance.

As he walked along the embankment,

a prairie dog owl, disturbed from its position on a mound, flew scolding and chattering about his head; and a big, gray jack-rabbit, that had been feeding in the alfalfa, leaped away for a dozen yards with jerky bounds, then uplifted itself on its hind legs on the margin of a lateral, a ghostly shape in the uncertain light.

The tired youth east himself down on the dry embankment some distance from the water-gate and began his lonesome vigil. As he looked up at the stars, that seemed so like luminous gems or points of fire, and reflected that the skies of the Orient were as bright, he could not wonder that the Chaldeans became astronomers and astrologers; and the story of the watching Judean shepherds took on new meaning. Crickets chirped in the grass, some joyous frogs croaked in a depression in the field which the ditch water had bountifully filled, and a few belated insects buzzed about his ears.

He knew that his mother was watching by the window, where he had left her, filled with anxiety for his safety, and lifting up her steadfast heart in prayer that the threatened evil might be averted or made a messenger for good. He did not intend to molest the wrong-doer, should that person come again, but thoughts of what might grow out of such a visit and discovery were sufficient to keep his mind abnormally active and drive away all desire for sleep.

But the drowsiness came after awhile, and his head dropped on the ground. A sudden outbreak of hideous sound sent a thrill through him and awoke him to the fact that he had been fairly asleep. He sat up on the embankment and rubbed his eyes. On the ridge, a half mile distant, some coyotes had broken into pursuit of a jack-rabbit. Whether there were two or a half-dozen he could not tell, as that chorus of yelping and "ki-yi-ing" shrilled through the night.

The sounds swept on over the ridge and across the plains, growing fainter and fainter, and finally ceased. Probably the coyotes had caught the unfortunate "jack"; a thing not at all certain, however, as the jack is blessed with wonderful legs and dodging abilities.

Then something moved between the watcher and the western sky; and, flattening himself on the embankment, Harry saw a man walk down along the ditch and step into the alfalfa field. He could not make out the form, and the face was wholly invisible.

His heart leaped and his nerves tingled as he fancied this was the individual who had opened the water-gate and dammed the ditch.

He was surprised, though, when the man, on entering the field, dropped softly to the earth instead of advancing to the gate.

The man disappeared from sight when he dropped down. Harry marked the

spot and watched it a long time with breathless earnestness, but could observe no motion. A little mound seemed to have grown there, and he fancied this mound the head and shoulders of the man; but of even this he could not be sure.

He feared to move on the embankment lest he should be seen, and, his position growing cramped, he slowly and carefully stretched out one leg and then the other, to relieve them. The mound in the alfalfa did not stir. Everything was so still that Harry fancied he could hear his own heart beat. He could certainly feel its thumping, and the arteries in his neck seemed to swell and grow warm. The trembling that at first affected him subsided after awhile, though it left him with a feeling of muscular weakness.

The vigil that followed was tedious and trying. The stars swung slowly westward and the night grew chillingly cold. Finally a silvery gray crept into the eastern sky, forerunner of the dawn.

Then the mound stirred. It lifted and resolved itself again into a man. It walked and approached the water-gate. It stopped on the embankment and stooped down to inspect the gate and ditch. Harry Purcell's heart gave a greater bound than at first. The man was Mr. Baily!

Baily did not tarry long beside the ditch. The brightening in the east warned him to be gone, and he set off

down the embankment and was soon lost to view. Not until he was well out of sight did the mystified ditch-rider venture to sit up.

Then the meaning of what he had beheld grew clear to him. Taking it for granted that Baily had come to open the gate, Harry had been sorely puzzled to account for the fact that not even a finger had been placed on the lock. Now he saw that he had misjudged the man. Baily had not come to open the gate — his stealthy visit to the field had been in the hope of catching Harry in the act.

The young ditch-rider blew out his breath in a whistle of surprise.

"If he feels that way about it, it can't be that he opened it himself!"

He walked back to the house thoughtful and puzzled. His mother, who had fallen asleep in her chair by the window, awoke, cramped and cold, as he stepped through the doorway.

"Poor little mother!" he said, smoothing her hair affectionately. "You should not have tried to sit up!"

"I declare, if it isn't daylight!" as she glanced through the window.

Then he told her of what he had seen and of his conclusions.

She was a perfectly honest little body and able to deal justly even with Richmond Baily. She recognized in the discovery absolute proof of Baily's innocence of the thing with which they had charged him.



"Well, he didn't catch me tampering with the gate, and I expect that disappointed him!" Harry asserted. "Now I



The man was Mr. Baily!—See page 12.

must feed the stock. I guess it won't surprise them to hurt if they get their breakfast a little early."

After again talking the matter over with his mother, Harry determined to confide his troubles to Jason Bigelow. Bigelow lived two or three miles away, but on the same lateral or branch canal. He was from Ohio, as were the Purcells, and State ties count for much when there are no closer bonds. He was a sensible man, able to give good advice if nothing else.

So Harry rode over to Bigelow's and told his troubles. Bigelow listened with quiet attention, making no comment until the boy had finished.

"I've heard a little something about that, though I wasn't prepared to believe you guilty."

Harry's face flushed. "Mr. Baily told you, of course?"

"No, Mr. Baily didn't tell me. He told Lee's folks about it, though, and one of the Lee boys told me. Baily says he is sure you opened the gate. Of course such a report will hurt you, if it is not contradicted. I'm glad you've spoken to me and explained the thing, for now I'll know what to say, whenever it's mentioned."

As he departed from Bigelow's and went on to ride the ditch Harry expected to see an accusation in every face. But there was little, if anything, of the kind. The farmers were too busy and withal

too glad to get the water, to give much heed to anything but the work that now pressed them.

But before nightfall he heard from two other men that Baily had been circulating the damaging report. The men volunteered the information, begging to assure him they did not believe it; for all of which he expressed his gratitude.

"If I was you I'd go to Baily and I'd say to him flatly that he had to stop it," one of the men advised; and with the words ringing in his ears Harry galloped home.

He did not sleep much that night; and the next morning, as soon as he had finished certain work that claimed his attention, he set out to make another call on Mr. Bigelow.

The big ditch was brimming full of water that morning, a thing calculated to make his heart glad.

Before coming to Bigelow's, and when full a quarter of a mile from the buildings, he reined in beside a boy who was utilizing the overflow of the ditch to drown out a small colony of prairie dogs.

It was Bigelow's boy, Billy, a lively urchin of nine or ten, who had his trousers rolled up and was splashing about in much excitement.

The embankments were rather low at that point, and the brimming ditch spilled some of its contents into the buffalo grass. With a long-handled irrigating spade Billy Bigelow had excavated a



small trench, that led from the little hollow where the waters were collecting to the nearest dog hole, and he was now ready to turn the water into the hole.

On the grass near by, tied up snug and fast, were two hapless dogs, that squirmed in wild alarm as the pony's feet trampled near them. They were roly-poly fellows, with fat cheeks, round bodies and short tails, looking something like squirrels but not at all like dogs.

Billy Bigelow was deep in a big speculation. The stage to Cactus Crossing ran close by his father's door, and he frequently had opportunity to sell tame prairie dogs to the passengers, who carried them to their Eastern homes as curiosities. Heretofore, what prairie dogs Billy had been able to obtain he had caught with a steel trap whose jaws were wound with cloth. But the dogs were wary and hard to catch with the trap. Now, with the overflow, Billy believed it possible to drown out and secure the whole colony. It was a stupendous enterprise, for live prairie dogs had sometimes brought as high as fifty cents apiece.

"Now jist watch him come a-bilin'!" Billy yelled, tearing out with his fingers the little dam that barred the water from the hole, and slipping his muddy right hand into a cast-off leather glove.

For the moment Harry Purcell forgot the errand which had brought him to

Bigelow's, and watched Billy with boyish interest.

The accumulated water gurgled into the hole for several seconds at a lively rate. Then a badly-scared and half-drowned prairie dog scrambled out ahead of the water that was rising in the hole and popped into Billy's gloved hand. It fought and bit, as a rat might have done; but Billy quickly slipped over its feet and neck some ready-made nooses and had it kicking helplessly on the grass beside the others.

"Well, I must ride on to the house, for I want to see your father," Harry declared.

Whereupon, Billy leaped up, with a flushed face, and began to fish for something in one of his pockets.

"I forgot to tell you about it. Pa wanted to see you this morning, but he had to go away, and he told me to come out here by the ditch and give you this letter when you went past."

He drew out a folded piece of paper, which, covered with muddy finger-prints, he handed up to the young ditch-rider.

Harry hastily pulled it open and read, with paling cheeks:

"Mr. Baily is circulating a petition among the ditch patrons asking the manager to remove you from your position, and he has got several of them to sign it. He asked me, but I refused, and told him I thought he was engaged in a mighty small piece of business, and that I felt sure you hadn't done the things he charged. I won't get to see you to-day, as I have to go to town; but I write this to put you

on your guard. Head him off! That is my advice. Write to the manager and tell him everything and refer him to me. You can get your letter there ahead of Bailly's petition, if you're quick about it. Your friend,

Jason Bigelow,

### CHAPTER III.

#### A SERIOUS ACCUSATION.



BAILLY'S amazing accusation angered Harry Purcell; and when he had reread Bigelow's letter, to make sure he could not be mistaken in the character of its contents, he hast-

ened home, resolved to follow Bigelow's advice and hurry an explanation to the manager of the Golconda.

This explanation was not easy to pen; for, when he sat down to commit the whole matter to paper, he found the story a very long one. He did not want to be tedious, but he did want to set himself right in the eyes of the manager and to make that gentleman understand how earnestly he was striving to fulfill the duties of his position.

When he had finished the letter, he read it aloud to his mother; and, as she found nothing objectionable in it, he placed it in a stamped envelope, which he

addressed, and then walked out to the trail over which the star-route mail carrier passed each day about noon on his way to Golden City.

Harry stood by the side of the trail with the letter in his hand until the carrier drew up and reached out to take it. The pony and buckboard, as well as the driver, were splashed with muddy water.

"The ditch has been running over at the first bridge," the carrier reported. "I had to go around a little, and the wheels cut the bank some. I got out and fixed the break as well as I could, but maybe you'd better look after it."

To this task Harry devoted himself without delay, and then returned to the house to get his dinner.

"I'm going over to see Mr. Bailly," he announced, when the meal was finished. "I'll be careful to say nothing at which he can get offended, but I shall insist that he's decidedly mistaken in thinking I opened the water-gate, and that he's doing me a wrong in telling it."

"You won't get into a quarrel with him, Harry?" Mrs. Purcell begged. "I don't know but that you ought to keep away from him entirely."

She did not urge him to forego the visit, however. She was quite as anxious as he that the damaging reports should cease. She could see how the thing was telling on him. He was not looking well, and her mother's keen eyes told her that the worry and hard work were threatening

to break him down. He had long ceased to enjoy sound sleep.

Baily was running some streams of water down the rows of Kaffir corn, as Harry rode into the field. He stopped the work to look up inquiringly, and frowned when he saw who the visitor was.

"I want to speak to you about that water-gate," said Harry, controlling his feelings as well as he could. "I believe you'll be willing to treat me fairly, if I can convince you that you're mistaken about the matter."

Baily's face grew red and he lifted a hand angrily.

"I've seen enough of you, young man, to know that I don't want to see any more of you, and the less we have to do with each other the better! If you say anything it will only be to tell lies. When I know a thing I know it, and that ends it!"

"But you can be mistaken!" Harry protested.

Baily again waved his hand.

"I don't want to hear anything! Not a thing!"

Harry sat quite still for a moment, vexation and anger filling him and threatening to break out in words. Then he mastered his feelings and turned away. It was quite useless, he saw, to try to reason with Mr. Baily; even worse than useless.

There was a choking lump in his throat and blinding tear-drops in his eyes as he

galloped the pony up along the ditch. Back of the lump and the tears was the sting of wounded pride. Baily's manner had been crushingly cruel.

"It's strange how mean some men can be! But I'll make him sorry for that yet! I'll show him that he's mistaken when he thinks I could stoop to so low a trick!"

How that was to be shown, though, the young ditch-rider could not have told.

The ditch was nearly empty the next morning, and, when Harry rode to the river to ascertain the cause, he found that some large holes had been washed in the dam.

It was a cheap and unsubstantial structure of sod, that ran diagonally up the river for nearly a fourth of a mile but did not cross it. Its purpose was to divert water from the channel into the Golconda Company's main canal. It answered well enough so long as it held together. But floods weakened it and frequently carried portions of it away; so that often when water was most needed and there was an abundance in the river the crops were wilting from drouth.

This was of course the fault of the Golconda Company, which, from the start, had pursued a penny-wise-and-pound-foolish policy. The company plainly wanted to make a great deal of money from a comparatively meager investment, always a difficult thing to do.

Harry wrote another letter to the manager that day, telling him of the con-

dition of the wing dam and asking that he might be authorized to repair it in a manner to make it practically secure.

He gave this letter also to the mail carrier, and then, with some young men whom he secured to help him, he went to work to repair the damage as well as he could in an inexpensive manner. Bags of sand were sunk in the crevasses until the bottom of the wall had been replaced; and on top of this, a barrier of earth and sod was reared, as had been done originally.

The manager believed that if willows could be induced to grow on a dam of this kind it would in time become stronger than if made of stone or timber. Harry, therefore, as he had done before, set willow cuttings along its top. The dam looked well enough when done, but he feared it would not stand the strain. Nor did it. A spurt in the river two days later took it out and made the hole bigger than before.

In the meantime nothing could be heard from the manager. The crops began to need another watering. Many of the farmers had not been able to cover all their cultivated land, and the fields that remained untouched were threatened with utter ruin.

Harry knew that the farmers had just cause for complaint. He was distressed, too, by the non-arrival of a letter in reply to the ones he had sent.

In the midst of it all, and when the

work and worry bore hardest, he again found the water-gate open into his mother's alfalfa field. There was very little water in the ditch at the time, but that little was being forced into the field as before by a dam across the ditch.

He was bewildered and indignant. The mystery of these repeated openings of the water-gate he had not been able to fathom. He had ceased to accuse Bailly of the deed. Still, he could not doubt that it was the work of some enemy who was desperately determined to ruin his reputation.

The matter rested so heavily on him that it almost unfitted him for work. He went to the river again the next day, and returned home much belated. Taking the short cut by Dutton's school-house, he saw lights flashing from the windows, and the shapes of men and horses moving between him and them.

He turned aside and approached the building. He had not heard that there was to be any "literary" or other meeting there that night. This was strange, as he was usually notified of such events—for they were really events in the lives of the people whose homes clustered along the canals and laterals of the Golconda Company.

As he moved towards the school-house, an undefined sense of impending ill came over him. Riding up to the hitching-rack that ran along the rear of the house, he swung half out of the saddle, and sat



thus, unconscious of his awkward position, while these words came to his ears.

"I tell you what, the farmers here must build and own their own ditch. They can do it. I'm in favor of forming an irrigation district and of mortgaging our farms for every penny they're worth to put the thing through. Then we'll be independent of this thieving company, and of the men who run it!"

The young ditch-rider swung on down to the ground, removed his foot from the stirrup, and prepared to tie the pony to the rack.

He knew now that an indignation meeting of the ditch patrons had been called. Such a thing had been hinted at more than once, though he had not thought much about it. Whether the Golconda Company was giving as good service as its funds would permit, was an open question. But that the farmers could construct and operate a ditch of their own was not an open question with him. He felt sure they could not. Many of them were hovering on the verge of want, and there were few indeed whose places and stock were not mortgaged for greater or less sums, obtained to help them along when they began the new life on the plains.

Before he had got his lariat fast to the pole, a man came around the corner of the school-house. It was Bigelow, who had stepped out to make sure his pony

was all right. He saw Harry, but did not recognize him in the darkness until Harry spoke.

Bigelow hesitated before replying.

"I ought to have told you about this meeting, I reckon, for I was informed of it yesterday; but I didn't see that it would do you any good, and I thought it might do harm, for I fancied maybe you'd want to attend. That's something I'd advise you not to do. The farmers are mad and Bailly is stirring them up. You're not authorized to do anything, you see, and when they jump on you about the way the ditch business is being run, as they're sure to do, you won't be able to give any answers that will please them."

"I'll see that you get a fair representation, Harry. Better go on home and never speak as if you knew such a meeting had been held. I'll tell you to-morrow what's been done. They're more mad at the manager than at you. He didn't do just the square thing by them last spring, they think. And now that wing dam is about the last straw!"

"I'm obliged to you for your kindness, Mr. Bigelow, and I'll go on home if you think I'd better. To-morrow, if I get no letter, I'm going to telegraph the manager, asking authority to spend a hundred dollars in strengthening the dam. I don't see why I haven't heard from him."

So he rode on home and Bigelow went back into the school-house.

Harry Purcell slept less that night than



usual. In imagination he heard the angry words of the farmers and the accusing tones of Richmond Bailly.

He learned the next morning that his worst fears fell short of the reality. Information of just what Bailly did say was brought him by a young friend, Jasper Stanton, who lived in the second section north.

"He says he's been lying out in your alfalfa fields of nights, and that one night, not long ago, he saw you come into the field and open the water-gate. He says you opened it and locked it open, and put the dam in the ditch. He says he saw you do it as plain as he ever saw anything, and that he knows he wasn't mistaken. He held back telling about it, it seems, until this meeting, when the farmers were all together."

For a moment Harry was too astounded to speak. Then he stammered:

"What do you think about it? You didn't believe it?"

"I think he's not over-particular about telling the truth."

"What did Mr. Bigelow do?"

"He didn't seem to know what to do. He just sat there, with his mouth open, as if he was paralyzed. But after awhile he got up and said that the charge was a very serious one, which he didn't feel called on to believe until you had been heard in your own behalf. He didn't intend to say, he said, that Mr. Bailly did not mean to tell the truth, but there was

still a chance that Mr. Bailly was mistaken."

"And no one else said a word?"

"Oh, yes, there was a good deal said. Mr. Bailly declared a dozen times that he knew he was right. And then, when the meeting was over, he got out his petition to have you taken off the ditch and asked nearly every one to sign it."

"I'm glad some one was there who wasn't willing to believe such a thing of me right off-hand. There isn't a word of truth in it. I shall go straight over to Bailly's and demand of him why he told such a falsehood. He's got to answer me, too!"

A hot rage had been kindled in the heart of the young ditch-rider. His whole being rose up in rebellion against this unjust calumny. A sense of his innocence sustained him. He could and would resign his position, if that was desired; but he would not leave the place with a smirched reputation. That must be cleared. Bailly had made positive statements. They should be explained or retracted.

Without saying anything to his mother on the subject, for he knew how the news would pain her, Harry brought the buckskin pony out of the stable, saddled and bridled it and rode away.

His indignation did not decrease as he approached the Bailly residence. It grew, instead, until it heated his veins like a fever.



A half-dozen bounds brought him to the spot.—See page 22.

Baily was not visible; and he drew near the house, riding around by way of the corral and the grain stacks, which took him along the border of the millet field.

Elsie was playing in the edge of the millet, romping with the shepherd puppy, and she ran toward Harry as he rode up, the puppy racing at her heels.

Her sunbonnet, blown back from her head, was held by its strings. Her bright

hair, which had been in curls — for Mrs. Baily looked carefully after Elsie's personal appearance — flew in a silky tangle about her face. The glow of health was in her cheeks, a smile in her blue eyes, and gleeful, childish laughter on her lips.

The young ditch-rider drew rein almost involuntarily and admiringly watched her. He had never seen a lovelier picture. She was not afraid of him — in truth she feared no one — and came straight on along the millet until within less than a dozen yards.

Then she tried to spring backward, and fell prone to the earth with a cry of fright. The puppy gave one sniff, and then ran by her and barked at something wriggling in the grass.

Harry Purcell sprung from his saddle. He knew what had happened. A prairie rattler, hidden in the millet, had struck its fangs into the child's flesh.

A half dozen bounds brought him to the spot. He saw the rattler glide into a hole in the earth, pursued and snapped at by the shepherd puppy; then he caught up the little girl.

"Did it bite you? Where is it?"

Elsie's face was as white as a sheet and her blue eyes wide open with terror. She gasped, as she tried to answer, and pointed to her bare ankle. Two small punctures showed where the fangs had taken hold and poured out their poison.

Fortunately Harry had had some ex-

perience in dealing with snake bites. He knew that prompt action was necessary, and without another word he pressed his lips to the wound and sucked out all the poison he could. Then he picked her up in his arms and ran with all speed to the house.

"Elsie is snake bit!" he said, striving to show no signs of flurry. He spoke to Mrs. Baily, who got up surprisedly from her work of sewing on some carpet rags as he entered.

Elsie made no sound. She was so utterly silent that she seemed to have been deprived of the power of speech or thought. But that she was entirely conscious was shown by the intelligent, though frightened, look in her eyes, and by the quickness with which she obeyed his every injunction.

Mrs. Baily, on the other hand, was perfectly helpless. The terrible announcement seemed to take from her what little energy and self-possession she had. She became a mere bundle of quivering nerves, running hither and thither, trying vainly to find the things he desired, and sobbing out wildly in her alarm.

Baily was not at home, having gone to a neighbor's to borrow a hay rake.

Harry glanced about the room. There was nothing with which he could cauterize the wound, and he hesitated to try to cut it out with his dull pocket-knife. So he twisted his handkerchief into a cord and applied it to the limb as a tourniquet.



Elsie compressed her lips, but no cry of pain came from them.

Mrs. Bailly was wandering abstractedly about the room.

"I can't wait longer!" Harry announced. "A doctor's got to be had, and the quickest way is to go to him. Don't worry. She'll come out all right. These things are not so dangerous when they're taken in time! Good-by. Have Mr. Bailly come right on to town as soon as he gets back!"

With this he again picked up the little girl, who had been lying, or rather half-reclining, on the floor, with her head pressed against the wall.

The obedient pony was standing with rein down, just where he had left it. Harry reached its side, after a quick run, and climbed with Elsie into the deep saddle. Then he set her in front of him, clasped her firmly in his strong arms, straightened the sunbonnet on her head, and touched the pony with his heels.

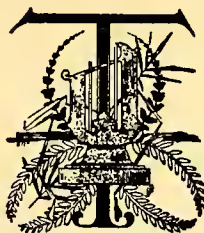
The trail to Golden City lay before him, straight as an arrow and almost as level as a rule.

"It's ten miles to town, Ponca!" he said, as he lifted himself for the work. "But we'll make it in time, or die. Now, go!"



## CHAPTER IV.

## A RIDE FOR LIFE.



HE pony lifted its ears at that stern word of command; and, from the jog trot to which the cudgeling heels had urged it, swung into a canter.

Mrs. Bailly ran out of the house screaming and wringing her hands; and the shepherd puppy chased into the dust cloud, barking and snapping at the pony's heels.

Harry Purcell held Elsie in as easy an attitude as he could, letting most of her weight rest on the saddle between his body and the high pommel, and drove the pony on across the wet ground by the stock reservoir, and into the arrowy trail.

"Go, Ponca! Go!" he urged; and Ponca, stretching out a scraggy, ewe-like neck, went down the trail like a trained hunter.

Fortunately the buckskin pony was fresh from a night's rest. It was used to hard riding, too. Day after day it had been accustomed to gallop from twenty to fifty miles, up and down the ditches and across the mossy stretches of buffalo grass. And it had the large lung-capacity and the untiring endurance of the true Western broncho.

When the pony was running easily, Harry dropped the reins on its neck,

guided it with his knees when it needed guiding, and lifted Elsie to a still easier position in front of him, holding her closely and lovingly in his arms. As he did so he looked into her face.

He saw that she was sobbing frightenedly, and took it as a good indication. Tears drenched her cheeks and a little semicircle of dust showed beneath each eye. The dust was blowing in clouds from the upper part of the sorghum field, where the pulverized soil had received no water and the sorghum had died to the ground.

The dirty semicircles walling in the tears were so suggestive of dams holding back the irrigating floods from overflowing the fair fields of her face that the young ditch-rider smiled in spite of his great anxiety and the gravity of the situation.

It was the best thing he could have done. She was quiveringly alive to everything and the smile impressed her with the belief that her condition was hopeful. She tried to smile back.

"Oh, you're all right!" he cried, encouragingly. "We'll be at Dr. Sarine's almost before you know it! I think I got out nearly all the poison. Here's Hudspeth's claim already!"

Elsie's ankle and leg pained her, but she did not complain. The compressing tourniquet seemed fairly to cut into the flesh; but, knowing it had been applied for a good reason, she kept her lips

tightly closed. The lips were very white, as Harry noticed; and they quivered tremulously. Spots in the cheeks burned like fever.

They were going at a good gait. The pony seemed to understand that something out of the common was expected of it. Not often did the ditch-rider drive it along thus with the reins swinging loosely.

A mile was quickly passed over. Harry lifted Elsie closer to his breast with his strong right hand, and, bending slightly forward, patted the willing pony on the shoulder with his left.

"Good boy!" he encouragingly coaxed. "Good boy!"

"We're beyond Hudspeth's windmill!" he hopefully announced. "We'll soon be at the ditch that crosses Cameron's wheat field. You're feeling all right, ain't you?"

He listened anxiously for the reply.

"Yes, sir!"

"And does your leg hurt you much?"

"Yes, sir!"

"It's the handkerchief I tied 'round it, I guess. Here we are, at Cameron's ditch!"

The little ditch was spanned by a wooden bridge. He caught the rein and gently lifted on it. The pony crossed the bridge at a bound, and galloped on down the trail, stretching out its ewe-neck and distending its nostrils. There were as yet no symptoms of tiring; though, when



Harry dropped the rein and slipped his hand beneath the edge of the saddle cloth he brought it away covered with foam.

He wiped off the foam on the pony's hairy coat, then again changed Elsie's

he knew. The poison of the bite had not been wholly extracted and it was beginning to show its deadly work.

Again he bent forward and patted the pony's neck.



The pony kept up the killing pace.—See page 26.

position, both for her ease and for his own. As he did so he started and a blanching look showed under the deep tan of his face. The ankle and limb were for a moment revealed, and he saw they were swelling alarmingly. A part of this was due to the tourniquet, but not all, as

“Good boy! Good boy! A little faster! Just a little faster!”

Two miles had sped, and the third was reeling out beneath the pony's pounding hoofs. It increased its pace a trifle, in response to this appeal, pushed its nose out a little farther, and threw its ears

back as if to catch his lightest command.

Thus went two more miles. They were cutting into the wind at an angle, and it whistled by his ears, high-keyed and shrill. The distance to town was half covered, now. But a pang of fear and dismay was tugging at the heart of Harry Purcell. The child was becoming a dead weight in his arms.

The swelling in the ankle and limb had increased; and, to his fancy, even her face seemed to be puffing. She began to be unconscious and delirious at times, though his voice would always stir her.

"How do you feel now?" he asked, as he again shifted her on his arm.

He fancied he could see a dim blue line reaching up the limb from the punctures.

"Yes, sir!"

The answer was but a mumble, and it was clear she had not rightly understood. A lump rose in his throat and fairly choked him. The fear that he might reach town too late came like a stabbing pain. Though the pony was doing its best, it seemed but to crawl, so great was his eagerness and anxiety.

"Good Ponca! Good Ponca!" he cried, his words an anguished appeal. "We must make it! Faster! Faster! Go! Go!"

The pony was sweating freely, and its breathing was not as easy as at the beginning of the run; but, under this urg-

ing, it pluckily kept up the killing pace, and even increased it by spurts. Little streams of sweat collected on its legs and ran down to its fetlocks, and around the edge of the saddle cloth and under the headstall of the bridle the lathery perspiration ridged itself in soapy foam.

Not once in the long, treeless stretch had a human being been encountered. At Nickerson's, one of the boys, who was plowing in a field, had stopped his horses and stared at the rider dashing down the trail in that life-and-death race. He had wondered about it; perhaps he had even recognized the buckskin pony. But rapid, even reckless riding, over those breezy expanses, was a thing too common for comment; and when the boy had gazed at the horseman for a few seconds and had questioned himself and his team as to what the horseman carried before him on the saddle, he lifted his lines and drove on around the field.

Another mile, and then another, was added to those passed over. The pony's breathing could now be heard plainly above the clatter of its hoofs. But the town was in full view, and Harry even fancied he could see the roof of Dr. Sarine's office.

But his alarm had grown from fright almost into a panic. A deathly look was in the eyes of Elsie Baily. She had sunk into a semi-stupor. Once, when questioned, she had complained of a pain in her side, and he feared that this was an

indication that the poison was mounting to her heart. The bound limb was so enormously swollen that he was half tempted to remove the tourniquet.

Just in the edge of town he encountered a cart with two men in it. They recognized him and said something; and, when he did not reply, they turned the cart about in the trail and returned to town.

Then the pony swept into the main street, with the race fairly won.

Harry struck it sharply with his heels as it bounded across the bridge at the street entrance, for it seemed to think it might now take things leisurely; and again the ears went up, the nose was pushed out, and the sharp, unshop hoofs pounded on almost as energetically as at first.

"Get up! Get up!" he commanded. "Don't stop, now!"

The pony fairly flew down the street, plucky and heroic to the last.

Near the center of town stood the doctor's residence, which contained his office. It was surrounded with fruit trees, and cottonwoods grew along the sidewalk for shade. Through these the sleepless wind piped, while the dingy tin sign creaked on its hinges or was banged to and fro.

As Harry approached the house, a shower of dust and sand flew around the corner, and out of this shower walked Dr. Sarine. He was a stocky man, with a pleasant face and smiling brown eyes, a

gray beard and rapidly whitening hair. But in spite of these evidences of increasing years his step was almost as springy as a boy's.

He stopped, as he saw Harry draw the pony in with a jerk and leap to the ground with the child in his arms; and then he turned back toward the office, for he knew that his services were needed. He was at the gate and opened it as Harry ran up.

"Snake bit!" Harry exclaimed, breathlessly. "Baily's little girl!"

The office door stood open, and he pushed on in without delay. Dr. Sarine followed more leisurely, but with a grave look.

"I was there when it was done, and I sucked out the poison as well as I could, and then came right here without a stop! I rode hard!"

Dr. Sarine did not need to be told that Harry had ridden hard. The pony stood where it had been left, with drooping head, hollow, heaving flanks, and quivering limbs.

Dr. Sarine knew Elsie Baily. He had brought her out of an attack of fever two years before, and more than once he had been consulted by Baily for rheumatism and by Mrs. Baily for a host of maladies.

In truth, those whom Dr. Sarine did not know were few in number. His practice extended over the whole county, and even reached to the lonely homes of the cattle-raisers far beyond the influence of

the fructifying ditch water. In the days of the great herds, when the cattle kings ruled the land, he had many times ridden weary miles to save the life of some unfortunate cowboy whom one of the vicious little prairie rattlesnakes had struck.

No man ever had a kinder heart, and no man was ever more unostentatious. His skill and his learning were free to all, whether they were able to pay or not. He is not painted from fancy, and it is possible he may read these lines, for he still lives to bless the little world in which his lot has been cast. Should such be the ease, he will understand, it is hoped, something of the appreciation in which he is held by his neighbors, his patients and his acquaintances, who are also all his friends.

Dr. Sarine took hold of the case energetically, without any fuss or formality. He placed Elsie on the lounge, felt her pulse and gave her a stimulant. Then he removed the tourniquet, examined the wound and applied permanganate of potash hypodermically.

Harry's heart almost stopped beating as the doctor worked. He knew that a crowd was gathering outside, and he heard some of the questions of the people who were looking in through the window. Dr. Sarine turned the key in the lock, to bar out the curious but well-meaning and sympathetic throng, and worked on; and soon the story was flying over the town

that Baily's little girl was snake-bitten and was at the doctor's, dying.

Finally Harry caught the doctor's eye. "She'll pull through," was Sarine's hopeful statement, "though the bite is in a bad place. You saved her life, I am sure, when you sucked out the poison; and at the peril of your own, too!"

Harry had not taken into consideration the fact that he ran a risk in drawing out the poison from the wound with his lips; but the danger, if he had thought of it, would not have deterred him in the least.

The sense of relief brought by the doctor's words was overwhelming. Elsie would not die! Until then Harry had hardly known how great was his fatigue. Excitement and the determination to save the child's life had sustained him. Now, as he got up from the chair into which he had dropped soon after entering the office, a giddiness and blindness came over him so that he would have fallen had he not caught at the wall for support.

"You're pretty well exhausted!" said Dr. Sarine, giving him a sharp look. "That was a big ride."

"Oh, I'm all right!" and Harry tried to laugh. "Just save her. All I need is rest!"

"Don't worry about her. She'll soon be out of danger!" Sarine assured. "I've saved many worse cases."

These words would have been precious



to the Bailys, at that time, if they could have heard them.

When Harry Purcell rode away in that cloud of dust, carrying Elsie, Mrs. Bailly had not known what to do. She watched him dazedly for a little while. Then she ran toward the stable; but, when half way there, stopped hesitatingly, in a state of distraction.

Elsie was the jewel of her heart, the one creature for whom she would willingly have laid down her life. She clutched at her throat, as she looked again at the pony receding so swiftly in the dust cloud, and a half audible prayer went up from her lips; then a pall of darkness seemed gathering before her eyes.

In a few seconds she conquered the feeling and went on toward the stable. But her limbs shook under her and all the strength had gone out of them. She fairly reeled as she passed through the door, and then she fell unconscious on the fragrant alfalfa that choked the entrance.

When she recovered, the whole terrible truth swept over her again, and she ran out into the corral, which opened off from the stable, and stared across the plains. Not a hundred yards away, Bailly was riding in on the hay rake, at a leisurely jog.

Mrs. Bailly hurried out of the corral and ran screaming toward him. He reined in, as she came near, and sought to understand her.

So accustomed was he to doing things

without consulting her, that, when he at length understood, he brought the whip down with a cut that took him by the neck and on to the house at a gallop. Mrs. Bailly ran after him, shouting something which he did not stop to heed or even listen to.

He jumped down from the seat of the hay rake, ran to the stable, and was leading out another pony when she came breathlessly up.

"Bring me the saddle!" he ordered. "Then take the pony out of the rake and turn him into the stable. You can git the harness off, and—"

"I'm going with you, Richmond Bailly! Put the ponies to the spring wagon. Do you think I could stay here while maybe Elsie's dying there in town?"

New life seemed to have come to her. The mother-instinct, that power which rouses and transforms the most timid of God's creatures, lifted her, making her strong and courageous.

Bailly, so long unaccustomed to consider her desires and feelings that the thing had become a mental habit, stared in amazement. But he began to obey without a word.

Not many minutes were lost in hitching up. The harness went on in some fashion, and Mr. and Mrs. Bailly climbed over the front wheels into the stiff-backed seat of the spring wagon. Then the whip was laid across the backs of the ponies in a way to send them down the

trail at a pace almost as rapid as that taken by the young ditch-rider.

"How long's he been gone?" Baily ventured to ask, squinting up at the sun.

"He's half way there!" she answered.

After that they subsided into a silence that was broken only by the clatter of the feet of the ponies, the rattle of the wagon, and the "b-r-r, b-r-r," of drouth-loosened spokes.

How long the distance to town seemed! Never had the trail appeared so endless. But Baily did not spare the ponies, and they were almost ready to fall in their tracks when the main street was gained and the wagon rolled down it bearing those anxious hearts.

Mr. Baily climbed stiffly out, for he had hardly shifted his position since the moment of leaving home; a sympathetic store-keeper, who was passing, came forward to assist Mrs. Baily; and some loungers, who had been lingering about the house, stepped up to care for the ponies.

"Is—is—"

Baily could not finish the question. He looked dumbly around at his wife, who was advancing, aided by the store-keeper; and then he stumbled blindly through the gateway and up to the door.

The office door was opened from within and Dr. Sarine stood before him. Beyond Sarine, on a lounge, lay a small form, half hidden from sight.

Baily's face became ashy. His heart gave a great bound and seemed to stop its beating. Dr. Sarine smiled and pushed by him to help Mrs. Baily.

"Your little girl is all right!" he said.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE DEBT REPAID.



HARRY PURCELL did not leave Doctor Sarine's office until sure Elsie Baily was well out of danger. She was unconscious and lying on the lounge, but the doctor assured him her condition at that time was chiefly due to the treatment administered. Harry had not forgotten his pony, and he looked about for it as he came out and while he was being plied with questions. Ponca was standing hitched to a post some distance away, with head down, but apparently much rested. The saddle and bridle were close by under a cottonwood.

Going over to the pony, Harry laid his face softly against its neck, where the sweat was drying in salty scales, and stroked its head and mane, while his tears flowed. Ponca looked about, thrust a soft nose against the stroking hand, and whinnied as if in sympathy.

"We saved her, Poncal!" Harry whispered. "We saved her!"

Feeling that the plucky pony had earned the best procurable, Harry took it to a livery stable, gave it some water, a feed of grain and unlimited hay, and patiently and lovingly rubbed it down.

Returning toward Sarine's, after an absence of more than half an hour, he saw Baily emerge from the office and step into the street. He had been thinking of Baily and of Mrs. Baily. He felt sorry for them and likewise glad, for Elsie still lived and would get well; but he was not, at all sure he wanted to meet Mr. Baily or speak to him, for he still felt that Baily had done him a cruel wrong. He was beginning to harbor, too, a belittling sense of self-congratulation, and to feel that he had effectually heaped coals of fire on the head of his enemy.

Baily saw him, however, and came toward him; and Harry could not find it in his heart to avoid a meeting with this man, who so evidently wanted to speak to him.

Baily fumbled a buttonhole with the fingers of his right hand and thrust the left deep into a pocket as he stepped in front of the young ditch-rider, who somewhat coldly returned his greeting. His manner was hesitating and he was evidently at a loss for words.

"There ain't no use pretendin' that I can pay you fer what you've done fer me," he began, "fer I can't! The doctor says

you saved the life of my little girl. I thank you fer that from the bottom of my heart, and I'm sorry that I ever said anything ag'in you!"

He released the buttonhole and feebly extended the hand for a reconciliation.

Harry was minded to refuse it, but checked the impulse, and Baily crushed the boy's fingers in an emotional grip.

"I'm glad to have served you, Mr. Baily. But you will see that we can't very well be friends, so long as you tell people I opened that gate!" Harry observed. "You wronged me there, and I think you ought to right it!"

Baily gave him an earnest look and the grip relaxed.

"I'll never speak of it ag'in, I promise you, Harry! I can keep my mouth shut as tight as anybody, I reckon!"

Harry stared. It was plain from the tone that Baily still believed him guilty and that this was merely a promise of silence. The young ditch-rider's sunburned cheeks reddened and he drew his hand away.

Baily felt the awkwardness of the situation and fumbled again with the ragged buttonhole.

"I can't pay you fer what you've done. Sieh things can't be paid fer! But I'll be your friend, if you'll let me, Harry, and I'll be your well-wisher whether you want me to er not!"

He hesitated for a moment, when Harry did not reply; then, seeing that

Harry was about to turn away, he brought the other hand out of the pocket with a jerk, and said "good-by."

"Good-by!" returned Harry, also walking off.

Baily stopped, when a half-dozen yards separated them.

"I reckon Elsie'll be glad to see you over to our house, as soon as she's able to git 'round ag'in. An' Mis' Baily, too. Tell your maw that we'd like to have her come over some day."

"Thank you, I'll tell her," Harry replied; and then the distance widened again between them.

Harry did not go on to the office, but he encountered Dr. Sarine on the street shortly afterward. On being reassured that Elsie was practically out of danger, he remounted the pony, tired as both were, and rode slowly back over the long trail home.

He found much to think about during that ride. He had won the gratitude and the silence of Richmond Baily. Baily's attitude was disappointing. It cut him cruelly to feel that Baily still regarded him as no better than a common thief.

Though Harry saw only a few people that afternoon, he found that the story of his ride to town was already spreading. To such as questioned him he told the story briefly; to the others he said nothing.

Elsie Baily was kept at the doctor's residence and under the doctor's care

throughout the remainder of the day and that night, and the ensuing day she rode home with her father and mother in the spring wagon. A few days later Harry saw her again romping in the yard with the shepherd puppy.

He did not go near the house, but he was told that Baily had not rested until the rattlesnake's burrow was opened and the snake killed.

In the meantime the dam had been patched up again and was holding fairly well. Harry rode the ditch industriously, striving to satisfy and pacify everybody, but he studiously avoided approaching Baily. He crossed a corner of Baily's millet field nearly every day, but it was the far upper corner. Once when Baily was out in the field on his pony, Harry chased away over the slope, as if in pursuit of a jack rabbit, for no other purpose than to avoid a meeting.

Baily was certainly keeping a still tongue about the water-gate. Not a word came from him, except in praise of what Harry had done in saving Elsie's life. These praises were frequently repeated to Harry; and he was sure if Baily had said anything else, that would have been repeated, too; for the ditch district had its full share of gossips.

One morning, when more than a week had elapsed, while crossing the upper corner of the millet, Harry saw Baily ride out of the corral and spur toward him. A meeting was so plainly sought that it



could not well be avoided. So, when Baily was half way up the millet and veering to intercept him, Harry stopped his pony and waited his approach.

Baily seemed to grow confused and hesitate as he drew rein, but he finally blurted out:

"I thought mebbe I ought to tell you that there's goin' to be another ditch meeting at Dutton's school-house Friday night." Having said this, he stopped and combed nervously at his pony's mane, then went on, more slowly: "But there won't be nothin' said about that — that matter, so fur's I'm concerned. And as fer that petition that I was circulatin' ag'in you, I burnt it the night we got back from Golden City."

"You're very kind!" Harry replied, unconsciously stiffening in the deep saddle. "I suppose I'm not wanted at the meeting or I'd have been invited. Well, I shouldn't have gone anyway!"

"No, I s'pose not," Baily slowly assented. "I thought I ought to tell you about it, though; and I just wanted to say to you that I burnt that petition and never expect to put my hand to another."

He stopped pulling at the tangled mane and lifted the reins. He evidently desired to say more and he as evidently did not know how to say it.

"Well, good-by! We want to be friends, you know. Elsie was speakin' of you yisterday. She's real chipper now."

"I'm glad to know she's doing well," Harry replied, with softening voice. "Tell her so, please. Good-by."

Then Baily turned back into the millet and Harry rode on up the ditch.

"Why can't he be a man and come right out and say he told lies on me?" Harry grumbled, looking back at Baily, who had dismounted and was examining the ripening millet heads. "That would be the right way to do, it seems to me. He keeps still, and lets the people go right on thinking I opened the water-gate, when he must know that I didn't."

The next day Baily drove Mrs. Baily and Elsie over to see Harry's mother; and Harry, coming in, was surprised to see the two women sewing and discussing carpet rags in timid friendship, while Elsie, who had quite recovered, amused herself on the floor with some home-made paper dolls.

Harry played with Elsie and talked with Mrs. Baily. The snake bite was discussed, with the incidents surrounding it; but nothing was said of the opened water-gate or of the stories Baily had circulated concerning it. Nor was this subject broached by either of the women in their talks together.

After the ditch meeting Harry called on Bigelow, and learned that Baily did not attend the meeting and that little of interest was done. Baily's absence had evoked some questioning, and the general opinion that he had stayed away because

he did not wish to say anything further about the petition for Harry's removal. The fact that, although he seemed to have dropped his antagonism to the ditch-rider, he had not retracted or even modified his statements about the opening of the water-gate, had not gone unnoticed.

"I reckon his pride won't let him go back on what he so positively asserted! Either that, or he still thinks you guilty. Which it is depends on whether or not he has been honest in the thing from the start."

Bigelow said this thoughtfully, as Harry got ready to go.

"But how could he have been honest in it?" Harry burst out. "He certainly knows he didn't see me open the gate!"

Bigelow did not reply to a point so well taken, and Harry rode away filled with serious thought.

In the week following, as he rode to and fro, he was made to feel that the opinions of his enemies had softened toward him. But the fact that Baily still made no retraction rested on him like a cloud. More than once he was on the point of riding over to Baily's to question him about it, but each time his courage failed.

The wheat and millet were harvested and stacked, when the water in the ditches began again to fail, and Harry rode once more to the river and examined the dams and head-gates. He saw that if the dam could be pushed far-

ther across and the breaks made secure by a sod wall backed with strong timbers, enough water might still be obtained. The feed sorghum was in a fair state to withstand a siege of drouth. The alfalfa had yielded two cuttings of good hay, and the third cutting was pushing rapidly and hopefully along.

Harry believed more money ought to be spent on the wing dam, and he rode back home, determined to wire the manager to that effect. But when he got there, he found a letter from the manager, which had been brought out by the mail-carrier. It read:

"Repair the breaks in the dam and do whatever else you see is needed. Try not to spend more than two hundred dollars. If we can work through the summer economically it will help us with the owners of the ditch bonds."

That afternoon Harry made arrangements with some of the farmers to commence hauling out the needed timbers from Golden City, and he got other farmers to put their teams to the big ditcher for the purpose of cleaning the main ditch at certain points and of widening the laterals where observation had shown this to be desirable.

He personally supervised the repairing of the dam, throwing himself into the work with a will. He knew that much was being expected of him and that he was assuming responsibilities undreamed of when he took the humble position of ditch-rider.

The weather had again grown extremely hot, though no dessicating south wind was blowing. The wind came from the southwest and the west, with a tendency to veer about and subside into calms.

Harry paid no heed to it, though early in the forenoon a blue-black line on the western sky drew the attention of the workers. Some of them thought it indicated a storm in Colorado, though a few were of the opinion that a mirage was showing the distant Rockies. But it was soon after seen to be a storm, which grew until it covered the



He became panic-stricken.—See page 17.



western sky, and then swept off to the southwest.

The farmers went home at noon for their meals and to look after their stock, and when they were gone Harry sat down on the shore end of the wing dam to eat the dinner he had brought in a tin bucket. Ponca, at the end of a long picket rope, nibbled the short grass farther up the slope.

When he had finished his dinner, Harry went to the other end of the dam and inspected some timber which had been carried out there by the men for immediate use. As he did so he heard a faint roar. It sounded but little louder than the sougling of the wind, but it quickly increased in volume and forced him to take note of it.

His first thought was that a storm was coming, but when he leaped to the top of the unfinished dam and looked off up the river he could see nothing. The stream made a bend a short distance above and concealed itself behind a ridgy shoulder, but no cloud had hoisted itself in the sky and there was no indication of a storm. Even the wind, which had ranted furiously an hour before, had ceased to blow.

Harry stood quite still on the point of the wing dam, straining his eyes and ears. The sound grew louder and louder.

"It's a flood!" he exclaimed, thrilling a little at the thought, though not with personal fear. "There's been a cloud-

burst up the river. Well, we'll have plenty of water! I wonder if the dam will hold!"

He looked at it. A heavy timber was half in place on its outer edge, and he saw that if this timber could be slipped two or three feet the dam would be much strengthened.

Under the impulse of the moment he leaped down on the wet sand, and, exerting all his strength, sought to slip the timber into position. The roar was increasing. The timber moved, and he was about to heave on it again, when the thunderous noise that struck his ears caused him to look round.

The flood had turned the bend, flashing out from behind the sandy shoulder, and was coming on with startling speed. It filled the channel from bank to bank and slopped over into the grass and willows. Its top was a frothing mass that resembled dirty torn wool.

Harry understood his peril at a glance. He looked at the shore and knew he would have a lively race if he succeeded in reaching it before the flood caught him. But he was not frightened. He did not have time to be. And he recollected, afterward, that he made a mental estimate of how far out into the valley the flood would extend, and decided that it would not reach the picketed pony.

Then he sprang down; but the leap was a hurried and awkward one and dis-



lodged a piece of timber lying loosely on top of the dam. He slipped and fell to the wet sand; and, before he could get up, the timber rolled down on him, catching his right leg and pinning it fast.

The limb was not broken and but very little bruised and the pain was not great. He tried to draw it out, that he might get up, and found he could not. The sand yielded beneath the weight of the timber and the leg was pressed down into it and held there as if in a vise.

As soon as he discovered he could not draw out the leg, he twisted about and got hold of an end of the timber, and sought to remove it; but he might as well have tugged at a house.

At this he became panic-stricken. The flood was fairly on him. Its advance sounded like the dash of a small Niagara or the heavy roar of surf. He beheld its advance as the trapped rat looks at the approach of an enemy, and fairly cried out in his anguish, for there seemed no escape.

His cry was swallowed up by the lash of the waters as the flood struck him, and he gave himself up for lost. But, instead of being annihilated, he felt himself caught up in a way he had not anticipated, and whirled down stream, blinded and choking in the grasp of the chilling waters. The timber had been lifted by the flood as if it were but a feather's weight. He thought he heard an outcry. Then his head struck something

and his choking sensations were succeeded by unconsciousness.

When he came back to life he was lying on the grass and looking up into the anxious face of Richmond Bailly.

"So you're coming round all right, eh?" Mr. Bailly chirped. "I was mightily afraid you wouldn't, the way you was acting. But you're worth a dozen dead boys. Biggest flood that ever went down this river, I reckon!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MYSTERY SOLVED.



CURIOSITY had drawn Richmond Bailly to the river that day. He wanted to observe the work of the ditcher and the progress made on the dam. Mounted on his riding pony, he had gained the rim of the tableland, that here formed the northern wall of the valley, a short time before he heard the roar of the flood and beheld its resistless descent.

From his elevated position he had looked down into the almost dry bed of the stream in advance of the flood and witnessed the frantic struggles of the young ditch-rider to escape from the pin-

ning weight of the timber. Then he had struck spurs against the flanks of the pony and sent it leaping down the incline.

The head of the flood had passed and the waters were subsiding when he reached the river. Seeing nothing of the hapless youth, Baily feared he had been drowned and buried in the sand where he had fallen; but, as he galloped along the bank, he caught sight of the boyish form in a clump of willows, whither the flood had thrown it.

He was out of the saddle with a haste that was phenomenal for him; and a few minutes later he had Harry Purcell in his arms and was half carrying and half dragging him to the high and dry ground above, where he began vigorous and successful efforts to restore him to consciousness.

Baily continued to talk and to work.

"How did that timber happen to ketch ye? The dam and everything's gone, I guess! But you're all right, though you've got an ugly lump on your head."

He rubbed the chilled shoulders with a hand that felt so like a nutmeg grater that Harry winced and tried to sit up; whereat Mr. Baily's smile became more pronounced and his comments more pleasantly garrulous.

"You needn't worry yourself to talk, yit, if you don't feel like it. I reckon I seen about the whole thing. And I'm powerful glad I happened along jist then,

too, for you wasn't in no good condition, I can tell you, layin' there in the willers, about as cold as a chunk of ice!"

Harry pulled himself to a sitting posture, and with Baily's help tried to struggle to his feet. But he was not equal to it. His bruised head thumped painfully and his ideas were in a muddled condition.

Galloping hoofs on the slope drew his attention and he saw some men from the ditcher riding that way. He was lying on the ground, with Baily's coat for a pillow, when they rode up. The sun was blazing hot there on the hillside and he was beginning to feel warmer, though he was still as wet as the proverbial drowned rat.

Baily hastily acquainted the men with what had happened; and when they had expressed their gratification at Harry's escape and asked a few questions, they galloped on to the river to survey the work of the flood.

Two-thirds of the wing dam had been torn out; but the river was running bank full, and the water was going in a torrent through the head-gate into the main canal. With the river at that stage no dam was needed to divert enough water to fill the Golconda canal.

Harry was on his feet when the horsemen returned with their report; and, when Ponca was brought up for him and he was helped into the saddle, he found that, in spite of his injured head, he was

strong enough to ride home; which he did, accompanied by Mr. Baily. On that home ride the talk was chiefly of the flood, of the ditches and the crops, and of the rebuilding of the dam as soon as the water subsided.

Baily stopped his pony at the point where they were to separate.

"Well, I'm glad I was able to help you to-day. It kinder pays back fer what you done fer Elsie, you see! Tell your maw to come over to see Mis' Baily. She's expectin' her."

It was plain that Baily desired to win and retain Harry's good-will; yet he carefully avoided any expression of a willingness to retract his charges against Harry's honesty, though he must have known that that would be the surest way to the boy's heart. Why was he so persistently silent on that point?

That was what Harry asked himself, as, after they had separated, he was riding slowly home. Why did Baily avoid that?

The ditches continued to run to their full capacity for a number of days. There had been heavy storms in the mountains, in addition to the cloud-burst on the plains, and these, combined with the melting snows, gave a good flow. The fact that there was practically no dam in the stream amounted to

nothing so long as there was a riverful of water.

The effect on the general atmosphere of the irrigation district was cheering and wholesome. The farmers were able to



He caught sight of the boyish form.—See page 38.

wet their fields thoroughly, and hope reigned supreme.

And those fields, touched by the life-giving water, certainly presented a beautiful sight. The alfalfa was of emerald greenness. The purplish blue blossoms



seemed to mirror back a bluer sky and loaded the Kansas zephyrs with a perfume like that of Araby the Blest.

The young ditch-rider, as he continued his daily rounds, seemed suddenly to have been dropped down among another order of beings. The scowls were absent, the unkind words gone. No one seemed to remember that he had ever been charged with an improper act.

While affairs were in this generally prosperous condition the manager made his appearance, coming out from Topeka, where he had his office and his home. He knew the farmers were in good spirits, now, for Harry had told him so by letter; and he no doubt preferred to come among them at such a time.

He was a shrewd, far-seeing man, of a speculative turn and energetic disposition. The Golconda canal had been constructed and its business was being run on money furnished by Eastern people, who knew next to nothing about irrigation, and were only desirous that their investments should yield the largest possible revenue. Between their demands for low expenditures and big incomes, and the demands of the farmers for just the reverse, he had found his pathway not altogether strewn with roses.

Of course he met and talked with Mr. Baily. Harry questioned him about this meeting in much perturbation of spirit. The manager looked at Harry hesitatingly.

"When I asked him why he had circulated the report that you opened the water-gate, he said it was because it was true; but, when I questioned him further, and wanted to know more about it, he refused to answer, insisting that he had dropped the subject."

Except that it revived Harry's bitter feeling against Mr. Baily the visit of the manager was productive of good. He granted concessions to those whose crops had not received water enough and made certain agreements whose fulfillment promised much. In addition, he gave Harry authority to rebuild the dam in a substantial manner.

When Harry began this work on the dam, the season was well advanced, and the crops, except in a few instances, had made a satisfactory yield. There could be no denying that the outcome would have been much better if the ditches and dam had been kept in good condition throughout the season, for the soil is phenomenally rich; but the failure that had seemed inevitable at one time had been mercifully averted.

Harry might have been quite happy now, but for two things: Baily had not withdrawn his damaging statements, and a field of young alfalfa was not doing well, because of a lack of water. Often Harry had stinted his mother's fields to let other patrons have water, but there was very little now for any one, and the need of the alfalfa bore on his mind.



One night he awoke with a terrible shock. He was standing in the edge of the lateral that ran to his mother's fields, spade in hand, clothed in his rough irrigating suit — rubber boots and all — and the water-gate was wide open! He shivered in bewilderment, as he stared about and down at his attire.

Then the truth slowly dawned upon him. He knew that he had just roused from somnambulistic sleep, and that his intense anxiety for the safety of the young alfalfa had caused him to get out of his bed and come out there to turn water in on it. And that was what he had done before. It was indeed he who had opened the water-gate!

He shrank within himself and looked dumbly around. What if he should be seen there, with those clothes on and that spade in his hand? Then, like a blow, the thought struck him that he had been so seen by Mr. Baily, which was the reason Baily had refused to retract his charges. Baily could not retract the truth! He had seen the young ditch-rider opening the water-gate at the dead hour of midnight; and though, in his desire to repay a great service, he might forever close his lips on the subject, regard for his own word would not permit him to say he had not witnessed the act.

Harry Purcell understood it all now.

He was thankful that the night was dark. He recalled how he had lain out on the ditch embankment and had seen

Mr. Baily slip into and lie down in the alfalfa. From that point in the alfalfa, on some other night, Baily had beheld the work he had denounced.

A feeling that Baily was again in the alfalfa so oppressed Harry that he could not banish it until he had waded through the grass to the point where he had seen him hide.

Satisfied that no eye was on him, Harry went back to the lateral, closed the gate and took the damming-board out of the canal. Then he walked thoughtfully home, divested himself of his irrigating suit and crawled into bed. But not to sleep.

In the morning he acquainted his mother with his discovery. She was as much surprised as he had been, for she had not known of his somnambulistic habit. They could only infer that his overwork and his desire to save the crops had temporarily made him a sleep-walker.

Both were so distressed that they could talk of nothing else.

"I've been thinking, Harry, that maybe you'd better go over to Mr. Baily's and tell him just how it was and how sorry you feel about it! If you'll let me, I'll go with you in the spring wagon and make Mis' Baily the visit I've been promising so long."

They were at the breakfast table; and as she timidly made the suggestion, Mrs. Purcell put a spoon in her empty cup

and stirred it under the impression that she was sugaring her coffee.

"They'll be glad to know just how it was. And I feel sure, Harry, that God has heard our prayers and that you will soon come out from under this terrible eloud that has been hanging over you for so long. 'He is faithful that promised.'"

But Harry was a little hesitant about going, and doubtfully shook his head.

"There's just this danger,"—and he seemed to measure his words as if he had long considered them—"Mr. Bailly may think that this is only a yarn of mine. I'm afraid it's going to be hard to make him believe that when I opened the gate I didn't know what I was doing! It has a queer sound, you see!"

Mrs. Purell's face showed her distress.

"Surely, Harry, he won't think that! He's done everything to make you forget that he ever said anything against you."

"Everything but say he thought me innocent. He may still be in that same mood!"

He drummed with his fork for a few moments.

"I'd like to do what you say, mother; but I haven't the courage, and that's the fact. If I was sure I could make Bailly believe me, it would be different. Give me time to think it over!"

He got up from the table and went out to feed the stock.

The discovery of the night pursued him with a haunting pertinacity throughout the day. Work was still being done on the ditch; and, when he visited the dam, he met a number of the ditch patrons. But he said nothing to them of the subject uppermost in his mind, though he almost fancied they could read his trouble in his face.

"Going to Dutton's?" one of them asked, as he turned homeward.

"Why, I don't know. What's going on?"

His thoughts were of a ditch meeting.

"Going to be a literary there to-night. It's strange you didn't hear of it, for it was given out at the spelling match."

"I wasn't at the spelling match. Perhaps I'll go; I don't know yet. Thank you for telling me about it."

His heart was vexed with a tumult of contending desires and emotions, as he rode home; but out of the chaos came a calming resolution.

That night Harry Purcell and his mother attended the "literary" held in Dutton's school-house. Nearly every one living within a radius of a half dozen miles was present. The house was filled.

Harry sat quietly with his mother and took little part in the joking and conversation that preceded the meeting. Nor did he have anything to do with the exercises, which consisted of the usual recitations, declamations and debate.

But when the meeting was about to

adjourn he stood up in his place and asked of the president of the society the privilege of saying a few words.

His face was pallid under its tan, and his voice was tremulous in spite of his efforts at self-control. As he glanced over the faces about him his eyes met those of Richmond Bailly. The sight had a strengthening effect. His form grew straighter, his tones steadier, and his hammering heart slowed down.

"You will be surprised, I know, at what I'm about to tell," he began, speaking slowly, as if feeling his way. "Yesterday I wouldn't have believed it myself. Last summer, as you will remember, a certain gentleman, who, I am happy to say, is now my friend, charged that I opened the water-gate in my mother's lateral."

There was a rustling stir in the throng and a buzzing of whispered comment. Harry glanced about and observed that every eye was glued on him; but he did not falter.

"I said, at the time, that the story was not true, and I believed what I said. But I am ready to confess that I did open the water-gate, and I want to explain to you how I came to do it."

Then, in a voice that constantly grew steadier and fuller, he told his story—told it in a way to carry conviction to every person there; for the feeling of innocence and honesty that sustained him so shone out through his eyes and spoke

in his voice and manner that the veriest doubter could not remain unconvinced.

At its close, he found his mother weeping softly and saw Mr. Bailly crowding toward him between the benches.

"I want you to forgive me, Harry!" Bailly exclaimed, catching the young ditch-rider's hand and fervently squeezing it. "I see that you've told the truth; though how could any one think you opened the gate in that way? Not me, I'm sure."

"You saw me?" Harry asked, certain of the reply.

The buzzing talk almost drowned Bailly's answer, for people were getting up all over the house and pushing across to take the hand of the young ditch-rider, whom they now saw they had wronged.

"Yes, I saw you. I hid out in the alfalfa. You see that was why I couldn't take back what I'd said. But it's all right, now! And there won't be anybody gladder than Mis' Bailly and Elsie; or me, either!"

He wrung the hand again, and then drew back to make way for another farmer who had signed the petition asking for Harry's removal.

There was a stream of men and women, after that. The "literary" seemed to have adjourned of its own accord; and so many women gathered about Mrs. Purcell, with words of kindness and sympathy, that she broke down and cried like a child.

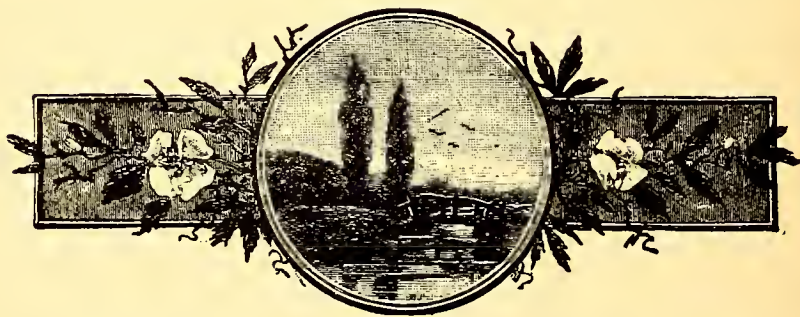
Whether it was because his anxieties were less afterward, or whether that midnight awakening on the edge of the canal broke Harry Purcell of the somnambulist habit, would be difficult to determine; but certain it is that from that time the water-gate remained undisturbed.

The repaired dam did its work well, and the next season saw a marked im-

provement in the management of the ditch, so that the farmers had not so much room for complaint.

Harry rode the ditch that year and for several succeeding years, in a way to give perfect satisfaction. Time has gone on, but the relations existing between the Purcells and the Bailys have been of the pleasantest since that troubled summer.

THE END.







## CHAPTER I.

### THE HOME ON THE PLAINS.

"THERE, that's beginning to look something like!" exclaimed Clifford King, straightening up, with hammer in one hand and nails in the other, and surveying the "shack" he was building.

"Like what?" questioned his sister, with a teasing smile. "Not a house?"

"Yes, a house. It isn't a mansion, but it will be comfortable, and we'll have the pleasure of knowing that we built it ourselves. You held boards sometimes, you know, while I sawed them and when I pounded nails."

"Your own nails, you mean?"

"And you've done all the cooking," continued Clifford, who did not like to be reminded of the pounded fingers any more than he liked the looks of the blackened finger nails.

"I guess it will do," said Miss Katie,

as she looked the shack over with critical eyes. "This door seems a bit wobbly and the north gable is a little out of plumb, but — for a boy who isn't a carpenter, and a young woman who isn't much of anything — it will do. Now, back in Indiana!"

"Yes, there are degrees of comparison," Clifford admitted. "If you should set this shanty up by the side of Judge Tilton's house back in Indiana — well, I don't suppose he'd be willing to use it for a woodshed! But out here, where few of the houses are any better and the country is brand splinter new, it isn't such a bad house after all. There's one thing sure — the tarred paper won't let it leak!"

Just beyond the half-completed house of two small rooms, stood a big wall tent, from which Miss Katie had emerged, and whence now issued an appetizing odor.

"My, that cooking smells good!" Clifford declared. "I shall soon have to ask

you to do your cooking only when the wind sets in the opposite direction. This work is giving me such an appetite I'm hungry all the time."

Sister and brother markedly resembled each other in looks and character. Both had honest blue eyes, fair complexions and brown hair; both were approachable, sympathetic and filled with the eager enthusiasm characteristic of Americans. Katie had passed her twenty-first birthday; Clifford was only sixteen. She called him a boy; and he was in many ways as boyish as a boy of ten, though at other times he was as manly and sturdy as a man.

Clifford glanced toward the tent and then across the stretch of prairie beyond it, a half mile or so, to a valley-like depression, where two ponies were grazing at the ends of long lariats secured by iron picket pins driven into the ground.

"I wish you'd just look at those ponies, Katie," he said. "Did you ever see anything so odd? What do they make you think of?"

"Hobgoblins!" said Katie. "Don't they look queer! And see how smoky the air is out there. It resembles real smoke, too!" with a startled inflection. "You don't suppose the prairie can be on fire, do you, Clif?"

Clifford King's face showed a trace of uneasiness. "I don't know," he admitted. "I hadn't thought of that. I'll run up to the roof and take a look."

It was the work of only a minute to mount the ladder which rested against the shack, but he could see very little more from the roof than he could from the ground. The atmosphere had a bluish, hazy appearance, which rendered it impossible to make out objects at any considerable distance. A shanty, which had been plainly discernible in the morning about two miles to the westward, was now wholly blotted from sight. Close to the earth there appeared to be a smoky heat shimmer, though the day was not hot.

"I can't see any fire," he announced, after an anxious survey.

Turning toward the ponies, he observed that they seemed much taller. Their legs had been lengthened as if by the addition of stilts; their bodies had also been drawn upwards. They grew taller and taller as he looked, and in a little while the haze so enveloped them that he might have thought them bushes instead of ponies if he had not known better. When they moved, the effect was somewhat like that of "trees walking."

"I'll tell you what causes that," said Katie, who was also watching the strange transformation.

"Then I wish you would," Clifford called from the roof.

"It's the mirage condition of the air. Mirages are common here, you know."

Clifford King seldom had cause to doubt the accuracy of his sister's conclu-

sions. Still, he could not help remarking:

"Well, I've heard of mirages and seen them, but I never knew they cut up such capers as that."

Though Katie and Clifford King had been in Western Kansas for some time, they were still to a great extent unfamiliar with the phenomena of the plains, of which probably nothing is more interesting than mirages. Six months before, Katie and Clifford had been residents of Indiana, from which State they had come, to join the great land rush, that reached its height in 1885-6.

After spending some time in Garden City, Katie had filed on a quarter-

brother had set up a tent and were now erecting a house. Clifford, being under age, could not "take up" government



A horseman was swimming into view through the haze.—See page 48.

section of government land near the center of one of the adjacent unorganized counties. On this land she and her

land, but he entered into his sister's plans with an enthusiasm that augured their success.



In addition, Clifford had secured the position of "locator" for the Garden City land firm of Rush & File, and had already done some work and received his money. More than one half of the county still consisted of government land, though it was now being settled at a rapid rate. Rush & File were appointing "locators" in every section of the Garden City land district, and, being impressed with Clifford's alertness and intelligence, had offered him the place of "locator" for the untaken land in his vicinity. Intending settlers were to be sent to him, and he was to look the country over with them and assist them in making a selection, or "location." For every person successfully "located" he was to receive five dollars out of the money charged the settler by Rush & File for their services.

"There's somebody coming," Katie announced, as Clifford descended from the roof. "Perhaps he's got another five dollars for you, Clif!"

Clifford hurried to her side, and, shading his eyes with his hand, stared off in the direction she pointed. A horseman was swimming into view through the shimmering haze. Both horse and rider were drawn to spectacular heights, and seemed to bend and waver like paper figures blown on by a wind. It was impossible to make out the rider's appearance until he was quite near.

"It's Mr. Glover," said Clifford, in a

tone of disappointment. "No five dollars there, for I've already located him. He is the man I located last Wednesday, on that flat quarter of section twenty, east of here."

There was a look of anger on the bearded face of David Glover, as he rode up to the unfinished house. He was a man of middle age, short and sturdy, with dark eyes and hair. He nodded stiffly to Katie, then turned to Clif.

"Mighty poor way you've started in here, young man, do you know it? If you expect to stay in this country, you can't afford to begin by deceiving and cheating men who are to be your neighbors."

Clifford's face reddened in amazement.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Mr. Glover!" he declared.

"Oh, you don't!" said Glover, with a sneer. "Well, you've put me just six miles south of where I thought you was putting me, and now I've made my filing at the land office and am stuck, for you know that after the filing is made it's too late to change. I've got the southeast quarter of section twenty, just as you said, but I thought you was putting me in the twenty in the township north."

"I told you township eighteen," Clifford stoutly insisted.

"But I thought it was six miles further north," said Glover, angrily. "I know you said eighteen, but you took me to the township north. What makes me



sure, is that there is a creek with a fringe of scrubby timber along it, not a great distance away. I asked you if I couldn't get wood from that creek, and you said you thought I could as long as the land remained untaken."

"Yes, I said that, and I say so yet," Clifford answered.

"But the creek is seven or eight miles from the land I'm located on," Glover declared. "How do you explain that? If I had got the land which you showed me, it wouldn't have been more than a mile or so away."

"I didn't tell you the creek was so near as that, Mr. Glover," Clifford urged. "I said nothing about the distance. I don't know just how far the creek is, for the plats I have don't show its location, and I haven't had time yet to visit it; but I'm very positive I never said a word to make you think that it was no more than a mile or so away."

Katie was pale and much distressed. She felt that it was possible Clifford had blundered in locating Mr. Glover, and had really shown him one quarter-section and located him on another. The entire country was bewilderingly alike in its general characteristics. There were no natural landmarks, and as yet only a shanty here and there at wide intervals.

"Perhaps you had better go with Mr. Glover and make sure, Clifford," she urged. "I hope you can show him that he is wrong. He may have gone the long-

est way to the creek. It's so easy to get turned around here."

"Nothing of the kind — begging your pardon, Miss!" said Glover. "I don't get lost easy. I've just come from the creek and know about how far it is. No, Miss; your brother took me for a greenhorn, that's all. He saw I wanted that other piece of land, which I've since found out was already taken, and he was afraid if he couldn't make me think I was getting it, I'd go away and he'd lose a fee. So he fooled me, just for the money!"

Clifford grew even paler than his sister.

"I wouldn't do such a thing as that, Mr. Glover, not for twenty fees!" he asserted. "You are simply mistaken. I'm willing to pay back the money I got for the work, and I think the firm will give you back the whole of it, if you're dissatisfied."

He drew his purse from his pocket and took five dollars from it.

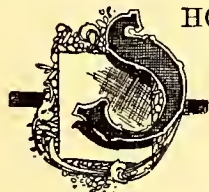
"Five hundred wouldn't make it square!" Glover fiercely declared. "I've lost my homestead right by filing on a quarter I didn't want, and now I've got to keep it. You thought because the land is so much alike I wouldn't know the difference; that's all. And now that I do know it, you'd like to refund and sneak out of it! Keep your money! I don't want it! You'll lose fifty times that amount by what you've done; see if you

don't! I shall be your neighbor. I've got to be, now; but I sha'n't be a very pleasant one to you."

With this threat, David Glover turned his horse and rode away, leaving Clifford and Katie hurt, indignant and perturbed beyond measure.

## CHAPTER II.

### LOCATING A QUARTER-SECTION.



**S**HORTLY after Mr. Glover's departure, Clifford King, acting on his sister's advice, took one of the ponies and rode in the direction of the creek, to ascertain its distance from Glover's land.

Though this was a matter of doubt, Clifford was certain he had not blundered in locating Mr. Glover, notwithstanding the fact that in that vast sea of grass one section of land so resembled another that only an experienced eye could tell them apart in the absence of distinguishing marks. What made him so sure was that he had been guided by mounds, which he had set up after running carefully-measured section lines.

That he might keep a straight course now, he took out his hand-compass from time to time, set it in position on his palm or the pommel of his saddle, and sighted

northward by lines of weeds and thistle heads.

Clifford King's earnest face was so pleasant and honest, so open and frank, that it ought of itself to have convinced David Glover that the youth was incapable of the deception charged against him.

"Of course he'll do all he can now to injure me in the work of locating," Clifford reflected, "and if he's very bitter and aggressive he can hurt me a good deal. But I don't see what I can do."

As he rode on, the haze cleared away, and blue, lake-like illusions began to appear. They were but another form of the changing mirage. A blue line, resembling a narrow thread of water, became visible on his left. It grew wider and wider as he advanced, and extended northward until the entire horizon in front of him seemed changed to a sea, from which extended bodies of water like bays and rivers.

This shrank, as he galloped on, and became a lake, on whose farther shores trees appeared to stand. The trees even showed their reflections in the lake. Yet the lake hardly looked real. As he studied it and recalled the stories he had read of the mirages of the plains, he marvelled that even travellers half insane by thirst could ever have been fooled by such things. He knew that the seeming bodies of water, which constantly changed in shape and size, were nothing more than the intensely blue sky reflected in a

stratum of air lying just above the dry soil, the air acting as a mirror. As for the trees, when he looked at them closely he saw that they were only weeds or thistles, exaggerated out of all proportion by the mirage state of the atmosphere, just as the ponies had been.

"That creek is farther than I supposed," he thought, as he still rode on. "The twenty that Mr. Glover declares I showed him must be near here. Perhaps that is it over there, where those stakes are set up. The land is taken, he said, and they have been put there to show ownership."

When he came to the creek, it was not such as he expected to see. It resembled a chain of ponds inclosed by high banks. The trees were nearly all cottonwoods and grew close to the water. Though they were scrubby, their tops projected some distance above the level of the country, and could be seen a long way in clear weather. The bright green of the leaves was in cheering contrast to the monotonous gray-green of the plains.

On reaching home after this jaunt, Clifford found there a farmer from Illinois, talking to Katie.

"Been thinkin' I could locate myself," said the man, after he had introduced himself to Clifford as Abner Brown, from the vicinity of Galesburg, "but I find I can't. Been lost twice to-day already. When I saw your place I rode over, and was mighty glad when your sis-

ter told me you're a locator. Ruther youngish for that, though, ain't you? Should think you'd get lost as well as other people, and make mistakes."

Clifford thought of Mr. Glover's statement concerning the southeast quarter of section twenty, but he only said:

"You see I use a compass, and I've put up guiding mounds to assist me. I shall be glad to try to find some land for you, Mr. Brown, and will change my pony and go with you right away, if you say so."

"Dinner is ready," said Katie. "Perhaps Mr. Brown would like something to eat before he starts."

It was an invitation that the tired and hungry farmer was glad to accept.

"That creek is all of seven miles from Mr. Glover's," Clifford said to his sister, when they were alone a few moments. "It's really farther than I thought."

"You're still sure you couldn't have shown him the wrong section?" Katie anxiously questioned.

"Quite sure," he answered.

"I suppose he will complain of you to the firm?" she said.

"I don't doubt it. But perhaps he'll see, after awhile, that he is mistaken."

"It's hard to be thought dishonest when one is innocent," said Katie. "But that's better than to be dishonest when thought innocent. If Mr. Glover is an honest man himself, as he seems to be, he will come to know and understand by

and by that you couldn't do such a thing. We'll just do the best we can, and be as kind to him as if he had never said a harsh word against you. You'll try, won't you? It will all come out right in the end, I am sure."

"Yes, I'll try," Clif promised, with sober earnestness. "I'll treat him just as well as he'll let me. I'm afraid, though, he is going to make me a lot of trouble!"

"I ruther like the looks of that country off there," said Mr. Brown, when he and Clifford were seated in the spring wagon drawn by the ponies, with Mr. Brown's saddle horse tied behind. "It'll drain better, because it ain't quite so flat."

"If some of the cattlemen are right, the question of drainage won't cut much of a figure," observed Clifford. "They say we'll find that it doesn't rain enough."

"It's rained a good 'eal since I've been in the country, anyway," the farmer declared. "I reckon the cattlemen haven't any too good will toward us grangers, as they call us, for taking up the land. You don't talk like any agent I've struck yit. Most of 'em brag up the country fer all it's worth, and a little more."

Clifford looked sober, for he thought of David Glover.







"Yes, I suppose so," he answered. "I mean to be honest and fair. I think the country is all right, and that time will prove it so."

After a long drive, Mr. Brown found some land that suited his fancy.

"What's the number of this, and how do the lines run?" he asked. "I reckon it ain't taken?"

"That's something I can't tell you right off," Clifford answered. "We'll have to go to the mound I pointed out to you, further back. Then we'll run the lines and measure to this land, and the plat will tell us the rest."

He took out a new plat of the township, which Rush & File had sent to him the day before. This is how it looked:

			N		
	6	5	4 	3	2 
	7	8	9 	10	11
W	18	17 	16	15	14
	19	20	21	22	23
	30	29	28 	27	26
	31	32 	33	34	35
			S		
					E

The taken quarter-sections are here indicated by crosses, but in Clifford's plat they were inclosed by lines of red ink.

"This shows a block of land six miles square," Clifford explained, "or thirty-six sections, numbered as you see, each divided into four quarter-sections of one





Clifford took out a new plat of the township.—See page 52.

hundred and sixty acres. That mound I thirty-six are school lands, not open to pointed out is at the southeast corner of regular settlement, but reserved for sale section thirty-six. Sections sixteen and for the benefit of the State school fund.

We'll go to that mound. From there we'll run north till we're opposite this land you want, and then west till we reach it, following the lines and measuring. When we get back here, the distance traveled will tell me the number of this section and the quarter. After that I'll put up a mound at one corner and mark it, so that I won't have to run the lines again when I want to find other lands near here."

"So that's the way you do it!" said the farmer, examining the plat with much interest. "But how do you git the township and range? I can't see anything on this plat, nor on the land, to show; and the sections all look alike to me."

"I couldn't get the township and range without a starting point. I know the township and range of my sister's land, and originally I started from there. You know, though, how they are found in the first place?"

"Can't say that I do," Mr. Brown admitted, looking at the boy with growing admiration.

"Well, the townships are numbered southward from a base line, which, in this State, is the dividing line between Kansas and Nebraska. Township eighteen, is eighteen townships south of the Nebraska line; and as each township is six miles square, that makes six times eighteen, or one hundred and eight miles south of Nebraska. The ranges are counted from a line running north and south through

the State near the city of Wichita; and any range east or west is counted in the same way. Thus, range forty, west, is two hundred and forty miles west of Wichita."

"I see," said the farmer. "You're almost a surveyor, a'ready. You'll make a good one, too. Now we'll find out what the number of this bit of land is, and if the plat shows it is vacant, I'll feel better."

When the mound was reached, Clifford placed on it his small hand compass set on a shingle. In the center of the shingle he had cut a bed for the compass, and at each end of the shingle he had fixed pointers, or "sights," the whole being a rude and cheap imitation of a surveyor's instrument, minus the telescope.

As the magnetic pole is not the true pole, Clifford found true north by taking into account the eleven degrees eastern deviation of the needle in this longitude. Then, leaving the compass resting on the mound, he tied a handkerchief to one of the front wheels of the wagon.

"Now, Mr. Brown," he said, "if you will ride ahead on your horse about a half milc as near as you can guess, I'll motion you into position by waving my hands, and will then follow you with the wagon."

This the farmer did, stopping when he thought he had gone far enough. Clifford, sighting across the compass, motioned him to the right, until he was

directly north of the mound. After that, Clifford mounted the wagon seat and drove toward Mr. Brown, counting the revolutions of the wagon wheel to which the handkerchief was tied. He had found by trial that two hundred and twenty revolutions of the wheel measured off a half mile, and when that many were counted he stopped the team.

A search in the grass disclosed the pits made by the government surveyors a number of years before. Two of these were found at the quarter-section corners and four at the section corners.

"This isn't accurate enough for regular surveying, when lines are to be established, but it's rapid, and answers my purpose," said Clifford, with a pleased smile, when the pits had been found.

From these pits another half mile was run. The land desired by Mr. Brown was reached without trouble, for Clifford had set up on it a stake and a flag. The plat showed that quarter-section to be vacant, too, to the farmer's delight. Then the proper blank was filled out, giving the number, township and range, that there might be no error when the farmer went to Rush & File, who were to perform the legal part of the work before the United States land office.

As Clifford and the farmer rode back in the spring wagon, they crossed section twenty, in the upper township, and there met Mr. Glover.

"This is the land you swindled me out

of!" said Glover, riding up to the wagon. "But you'll not make anything by it. I'm going in to see your firm about it to-morrow.

"Better let this youngster alone!" he advised, turning to Brown. "He cheated me, and I don't doubt he'll cheat you if he gets the chance!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### FIRE FROM THE ENEMY.



AS Mr. Glover rode away, Clifford, with flushed face, explained to the farmer the meaning of Glover's statements.

"You don't look like you'd do a thing of that kind," said the farmer, closely eyeing the youth.

"Indeed, Mr. Brown, I couldn't!" was Clifford's earnest declaration. "I shouldn't be able to sleep of nights if I had done such a thing. But Mr. Glover refuses to believe me."

"Tain't pleasant to have enemies, that's a fact!" the farmer philosophically observed, as they jogged on. "I've had 'em, and I know. There's only one way to do, though. Treat 'em just the same as if they was friends, so fur as they'll let you, and keep yourself above the meanness they charge to you."

That the old farmer did not instantly

lose faith in him, was a great comfort to Clifford King.

"Perhaps others will believe me, too," he thought; "and by and by they'll know the truth."

The next morning Clifford saw Mr. Glover ride away in the direction of the town, and it made him uneasy. But when three or four days passed and no complaint came from Rush & File, he began to feel sure that Glover had not been able to injure him in the eyes of the firm.

Clifford located two other men that week; and on the following Saturday he drove into town with his sister. They needed supplies. They also wanted to attend church on Sunday, and Clifford desired to see the firm. It required the greater part of one day to make the trip in.

Clifford found opportunity for an interview with Mr. Rush that evening.

"Yes, Glover came to us and told his story," said Mr. Rush. "I thought it quite likely you had made a mistake. Such things have happened. I assured him, though, that if you had I knew it was unintentional, and that we stood ready to do whatever was right in the matter. But we couldn't come to any agreement, and he went away angry."

Mr. Rush was a small, alert man, with jet black hair and eyes. He nervously drummed the table with a pencil as he talked.

"We should have written you, only

we've been too busy. But don't let it worry you. We're having all the work we can do, and Mr. Glover can't hurt us much. The settlers are fairly tumbling over each other. We're expecting to send you a whole wagon-load next Wednesday. A party is coming out from Ohio, that we shall try to locate up there."

Mr. Rush's black eyes lightened in anticipation of the harvest he expected from the stampeding influx of people who were anxious to obtain government land.

"There's another thing," said Rush, "and I'm glad you're here, for I can talk to you about it better than write it. We're going to start a town in the very center of your county, just five miles from you. We shall call it Vego Center; and we intend to boom it and try to make it the county seat. Columbus Holmes, who is running in opposition to us, is going to start a town north of you on Cottonwood Creek, to be named Columbus. He tried to get the section we got, but we were ahead of him. So he took the other, and is going to make a point of the fact that his location is a little more picturesque, and, as he says, more desirable as a site for a town. But the fact that we shall be right in the center of the county gives us such an advantage that there isn't a doubt that our town will win."

The idea of a real estate firm starting a town in this way was something new to Clifford.

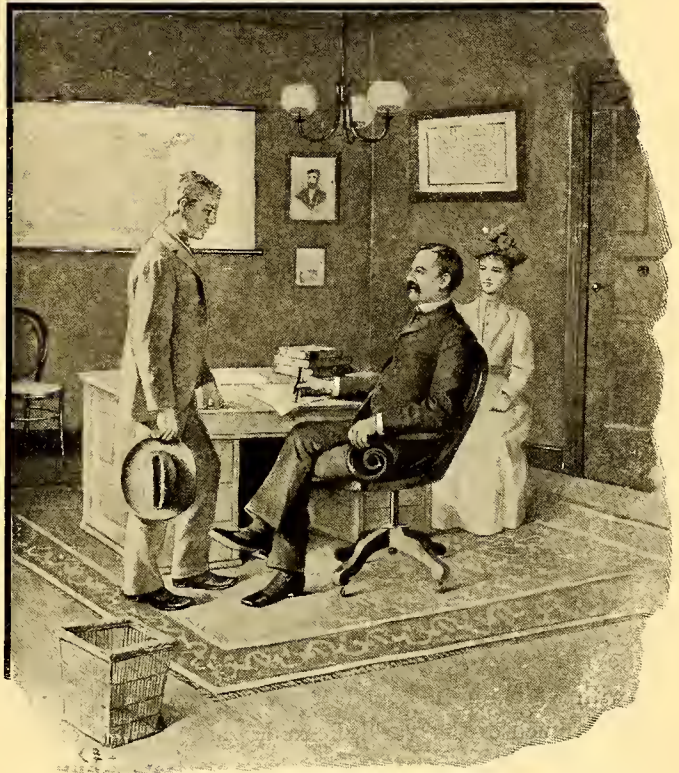


"We begin the surveys Monday, and we shall have an agent right there all the time. You will work under him and report to him. We want you to put in your best work for Vego Center. We shall give you a lot, so that you may feel that you have an interest in it aside from the fees."

As Clifford went out into the street, with the shadows of night gathering and the lamps beginning to shine in the offices and business houses, the intoxicating spirit of the boom, communicated to him by Mr. Rush, gathered force by what he saw and heard. The streets were filled with men who were talking of land and locations, quarter-sections and town lots, and of towns and county seats that existed as yet only on paper.

town there would be to make Glover more bitter in his enmity.

As Clifford walked up the street, he saw more than a hundred men in line awaiting their turn to reach the delivery window of the post-office. The line ex-



"Put in your best work for Vego Center," said Mr. Rush.

Cottonwood Creek, where Columbus Holmes was to start his town, was the creek Clifford had visited. The proposed site lay just north of that section twenty where Glover claimed he should have been filed. The probable effect of starting a

tended from within the post-office some distance down the street, and he was informed that many of the men had been standing thus in line for more than an hour. It was the same way at the land office, he was told. The real estate firms

had men who took the location filings for the day and stationed themselves before the land office windows as early as one o'clock in the morning, that they might be sure to get the filings in among the first when the office opened for business at nine o'clock.

Out of the Saturday night rush and clamor into the peaceful calm of a church on Sunday morning, was like a transition to another world. Probably a hundred people were gathered in the little church. The windows were open to let in the balmy, pleasant air, and the shade of a cottonwood spread a shifting mottled carpet on the carpetless aisle near the seat to which Clifford and Katie had been shown by the usher.

How quiet and peaceful it all was! Yet Clifford's thoughts lingered with projected towns and vacant quarter-sections, until the minister read the text: "What shall it profit it a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

The minister was a man past middle age, with whitening hair and beard. He had seen much of the world, he said, and knew well from experience and observation how unsatisfying are the riches of this earth alone. In great tenderness and love he urged his hearers, the majority of whom were strangers to him and to each other, to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

It strengthened and steadied the heart

of the youth, who was in danger of being swept away into forgetfulness by the whirl of this marvellous land rush; and, when he returned with his sister, the next day, to the claim and to the work of building the house and of locating land-hungry men, he had a sweet inner calm that was blessed and helpful. He would put his life and all its interests in the keeping of the Loving One. He would strive to do what was right and leave all to him.

By the close of the week the sites of the new towns of Vego Center and Columbus had been laid off, and strings of lumber wagons were hauling out material, and buildings were being erected. It was the way of this new country. Everything was done in a feverish rush.

The starting of these towns sent a swarm of settlers in that direction, and for a time Clifford had almost more work than he could do. His house-building was entirely suspended, and he was away from home so much that Katie got a girl from one of the settlers' families to stay with her for a time.

While on his way home one afternoon from a hurried trip to Vego Center, Clifford was surprised to see Glover's horses grazing in a small valley a long distance from Glover's claim. They were dragging their picket pins at the ends of the rope lariats, showing that they had escaped by pulling the picket pins out of the ground.

Recent rains had somewhat softened the hard soil, so that it was an easy matter for a lariat-ed horse to drag out its picket pin.

Another effect of the rains was the disappearance of the mirages. No mirages showed when the grass and soil were wet. Only when earth and sky became arid and desert-like were the mirages to be seen. The dryer the weather the more beautiful and strange were their manifestations.

"Mr. Glover's horses have pulled their picket pins and got away, and of course he don't know where they are," was Clifford's conclusion, as soon as he saw the horses. "I suppose I ought to drive them home for him. I should like to have a neighbor do that for me, if our ponies should get away."

Clifford was in a hurry, though. To drive the team home meant trouble and loss of time, and just then time was money.

"And he's doing all he can to injure me," was Clifford's indignant thought. "I've lost two locations through him this week. That means ten dollars. My golden harvesting time will be over just as soon as the land is all taken, which will be before long, and ten-dollars means a good deal to us now."

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" came back to Clifford from the minister's discourse.

As he sat on his pony and looked down

into the little valley where the horses were grazing, he knew that if he did not drive them home or tell Mr. Glover where they were to be found, Glover might search vainly for them for days.

"But I can't afford to 'gain the world' dishonestly," he muttered, as he turned in the direction of the straying horses. The words of Abner Brown, the Illinois farmer, came to strengthen him: "Treat 'em just the same as if they was friends, so fur as they'll let you."

Clifford rode down into the valley and turned the horses in the direction of home. They were not easy to drive, however, for they enjoyed to the utmost this newly-found freedom, and several times tried to break away. The dragging picket pins impeded them, though, and made it possible for Clifford to keep them headed in the general direction of Glover's.

There was a queer look on Glover's face when he came out of his tent and saw the horses being driven in by Clifford.

"I've been hunting for those runaways for two days," he said, "and have sent word in every direction. Where did you find 'em?"

Clifford explained.

"I'm obliged to you, I'm sure," said Glover. "I didn't expect it of you."

Clifford flushed. "Neighbors should be neighborly; it was only doing as I would wish another to do by me."



"Oh, yes, I know," said Glover. Then he added, a little embarrassedly, "Have you heard that I am to be the agent here for Columbus Holmes? That'll put us against each other."

"And you're thinking that perhaps I returned your horses to gain your goodwill, so that you won't fight me so hard?" Clifford questioned, that feeling of hurt indignation again rankling. "I didn't; though I do hope we may be able to treat each other fairly, even if we are to represent opposing interests!"

He turned his pony to ride away.

"I didn't say you did that; I only—"

But Clifford King was now out of hearing of further explanations.

Clifford, who was working quite as hard for Rush & File and for Vego Center, found Glover a competitor worthy of his best efforts.

Though they often met, they took little notice of each other. There was one gratifying thing, though. Clifford began to hear less and less of attacks made upon him by Glover. By and by it became evident that Glover had almost wholly ceased to speak of the thing on which he had so constantly harped at the outset.

Clifford fancied this might be due to the fact that the story had ceased to be an available weapon. The lands were soon all taken; and this was followed by such an era of excitement that men had little time and less patience to listen to the story of a boy's blunder or wrongdoing.

## CHAPTER IV.

### LOCATING RIVAL TOWNS.



DAYS and weeks immediately following this unsatisfactory meeting between Clifford King and David Glover, showed that Glover was a man of

intense activity. Columbus Holmes could not have found a more industrious agent or zealous champion. Glover worked and talked early and late to induce settlers to take the vacant lands about Columbus and to invest in its lots.

Within two months after the surveys were made, each of the rival towns was able to boast of stores, hotels and business houses; together with a goodly number of inhabitants, whose chief business seemed to be to sell lots and lands to each other and to all comers.

It was impossible for Clifford King and his sister to escape entirely the contagion that filled the air. Clifford had made money so rapidly that they felt they could safely invest three hundred dollars of it in Vego Center property. They heard that Glover was putting every cent he could earn and borrow into Columbus.

"We can afford to stake down a little,"



said Clifford. "I shouldn't want to risk building the house. He could not afford all, though, as Mr. Glover is doing." to do that sort of work now. So he hired

After this step had been taken, and a carpenter; and, because money was

Katie had given herself time to think, she spoke to Clifford with questioning earnestness.

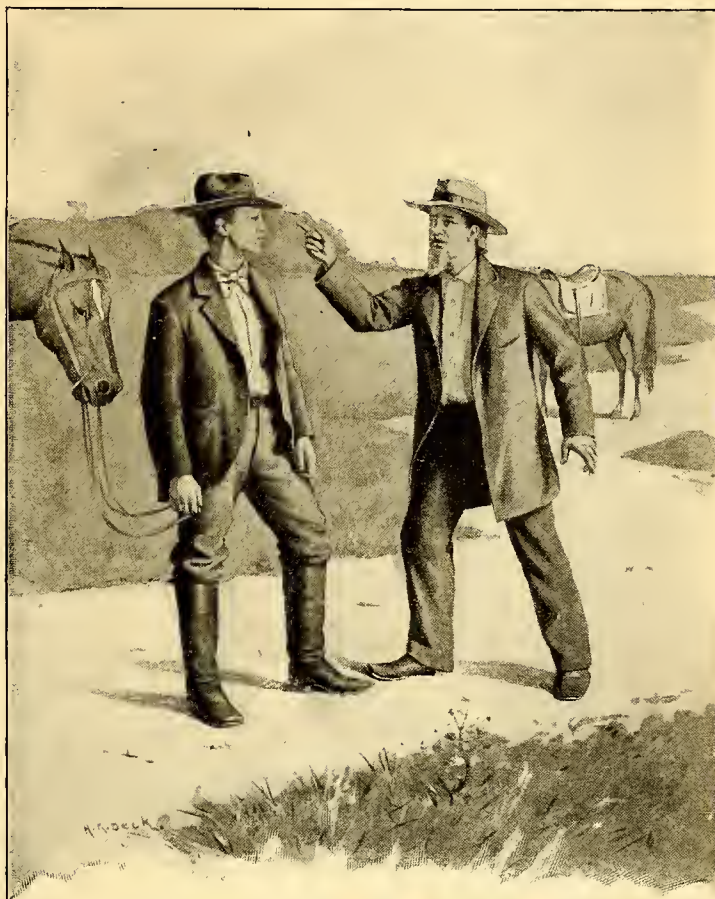
"Clif, dear," she said, "it does seem as though there was more excitement and rivalry over this work than is just right, doesn't it?"

"Well," said Clifford, "perhaps some are claiming more for the future of this part of the country than is just warrantable. But time may prove them nearer right than we think."

The summer had turned very hot. The grateful rains had ceased to fall.

The grass was beginning to sere and the mirages had returned. What crops had been planted were withering. The farmers grew sober.

Clifford did not return to the work of



'We shall beat you!' Glover declared.—See page 62.

coming in rapidly, the house was practically rebuilt and slightly enlarged.

"I wish I could do something to make money," said Katie. "It is too bad that one can be only a woman and a house-

keeper in such a time as this! But you just wait, Clifford, till there's a demand for a school in this neighborhood, which won't be long now! Then you'll see me blossom out into a full-fledged school-ma'am!"

"And instruct Mr. Glover's children?" laughed Clifford.

"Yes, and all the others."

"Well, Mr. Glover has become quite friendly lately. Did I tell you that he actually nodded to me as we passed yesterday? I was surprised."

"And glad, I hope?"

"Y-e-s. I'm sure I want to be friendly."

David Glover had also erected a little house on his claim and had installed his family in it. Houses had multiplied all about. A stage-coach line had been established. Windmills wheeled and whirled in the brisk breezes. Civilization seemed to have come to stay.

As yet there were no religious services nearer than Garden City, but a school-house and a minister for Vego Center were talked of.

When the lands had all been taken up, there was not so much work for Clifford, and he gave more attention to matters at home. The rivalry between Vego Center and Columbus had taken a new phase, into which he could not go with spirit, and in which he could have done little anyway because of his youth. This was the struggle now entered upon for the

location of the county seat. Naturally Clifford and Katie wanted Vego Center to win. Their interests were there, as well as most of their new friends and acquaintances. But neither took any active part in bringing success to Vego Center. They were not voters.

Glover, however, threw himself into the contest with intense ardor on the side of Columbus. For nearly a month before the election he was hardly at home day or night.

"We shall beat you!" he declared, with a triumphant smile, as he met Clifford in the road one day.

The old "trails," which took the shortest cuts across the country, were giving way to public roads laid out along section lines.

"I'm not in this fight," said Clifford, glad to meet Glover more than half way in a spirit of reconciliation.

"But you're interested!" said Glover. "You hope your town will win?"

"Yes, of course," Clifford answered. "That's natural. And I think it will, too."

"Never!" Glover asserted.

On the afternoon of election day Katie and Clifford drove into Vego Center. The country districts were almost deserted. All day long men and teams had been seen going toward Columbus and Vego Center and toward other points where there were polling places. The very air seemed charged with a feeling of

excitement, which made staying at home dull work indeed.

They found the dusty streets of Vego Center crowded with men who talked earnestly.

"And to think how little while ago this was but a prairie!" was Clifford's comment.

As there was no room for the ponies in the over-crowded livery stables, Clifford tied them to the spring wagon in a vacant lot and gave them a feed of grain in the wagon-box, after which he and Katie went to the house of a friend, where they knew they would be welcome. There Katie remained, while Clifford sallied out to mingle with the excited crowds in the streets.

Soon after nightfall the returns began to come in, and then word went round that Vego Center had won. This was followed by victorious cheering.

The count of the votes cast at Vego Center had been made, and no one now remained at the polling place except the board still in charge of the ballot box and returns. Clifford strolled past this room and beheld the members of the poll board grouped about a table, eating. The night was warm and the windows were open.

He walked on, intending to start home soon, for the night promised to be dark, and Katie was not fond of night traveling under such conditions. As he turned the corner, where the shadows fell heavy and black, he was surprised to see David

Glover move away from the side of the building and hurriedly lose himself in the darkness.

The circumstance struck Clifford as rather singular, and he said to an acquaintance, whom he saw a few moments afterward, that "Glover seemed to feel rather lonely in Vego Center."

The throngs in the streets were still cheering, as Clifford and Katie drove out of the town.

Even after they had reached home they could see the rockets still ascending.

"I suppose Mr. Glover does not enjoy seeing them," thought Clifford, as he watered the ponies and led them into the little stable. "Well, I shall be glad when the matter is established beyond a doubt, and life takes up its old ways again."

Morning brought a bewildering surprise. Before the sun had risen, a horseman clattered up to the house and knocked without dismounting.

Clifford hastily dressed and opened the door. A slip of paper was handed to him by a deputy sheriff. He glanced at it and saw that it was a subpoena to appear at once before some legal functionary in Vego Center.

"What does it mean?" he asked, in bewilderment and apprehension.

"Just this," said the officer. "The ballot-box and returns are missing from the poll-room. The officers have been informed that you can probably give some information that will tend to show who

took them. Of course it was some enemy of Vego Center!"

Clifford instantly recalled that hasty glimpse of David Glover moving away from the shadow of the poll building. The possible meaning of it almost made his heart stand still. He knew he was to be asked to testify against Glover. But he said nothing of this to Katie.

## CHAPTER V.

### FALSE ACCUSATION.



HE officer looked questioningly at Clifford King, in whose face anxiety was plainly written.

"I—I may speak to my sister?" Clifford asked.

"And eat a bite, too, if you like. I don't mind waiting a few minutes. It's quite a jaunt out here, and my horse is a little tired."

Clifford turned back into the house, to meet Katie coming from her room. She had heard the knock and the talk and had risen also and dressed.

"I've got to go to town at once," Clifford said. "Of course that man repeated what I said to him about seeing Mr. Glover near the poll building! It makes me wish we had stayed at home yesterday."

Both knew that, whatever might be the result to Mr. Glover, it would rekindle his animosity against Clifford. Perhaps, too, Mr. Glover was entirely innocent of any wrong-doing. He might have had a perfectly valid reason for being near the poll-room and at the same time not wishing to be recognized.

"It's too bad!" said Katie, with tremulous lip. "Right when Mr. Glover is beginning to think kindly of you! He is sure to blame you."

"Has any one been arrested for the theft of the ballot-box?" Clifford stepped to the door and asked the question of the officer.

"No, not so far as I've heard. I don't know what news they've got, nor what they're expecting to try to show by you. I reckon you could tell that? They're keeping everything quiet."

He eyed Clifford inquiringly as he said this.

Clifford turned back into the house without answering.

"I'm going with you!" Katie declared. "I'll make some coffee and cook some eggs, which won't take long. Tell him we'll be ready to go in a short time."

Then she hurried into the kitchen, leaving Clifford to talk with the officer, who had now dismounted and was preparing to lead his horse to the drinking trough.

"With the ballot box and returns missing, it will be impossible, of course,



for us to show that Vego Center won the election," the officer explained, as Clifford walked with him toward the well. "Unless they can be found, or the guilty party made to confess, there will probably have to be a new election."

Finding that Clifford did not volunteer the story of which he was supposedly in possession, the officer resorted to leading questions to extract it. But Clifford had learned a lesson from the result of his incautious statements of the evening before, and was wary.

"It might wrong an innocent man, if I should say what I think they intend to question me about," he mused.

Clifford and Katie drove into town in the spring wagon, with the officer jogging along at their side on his horse. A brisk wind arose and the dust came up the beaten road in clouds. Though the hour

was early, the south wind was hot and wilting. Now and then an agile sand lizard, delighting in the heat, scampered



"I don't wonder he rides away," said Mrs. Glover.—See page 67.

along in front of one of the wheels as if tempting its fate.

"This sort of weather will be hard on the crops," Clifford observed.

"Yes, if it keeps up it will wither

a mighty big crop of hopes. It won't do Vego Center much good to get the county seat if the county raises nothing."

Katie's mind was so burdened that she could hardly endure the talk about ordinary things. More than once her blue eyes filled with tears. When he observed this, Clifford became silent. At last Katie leaned her elbow upon the end of the wagon-seat, and, covering her eyes with her small brown hand, strove to regain a quiet spirit. "Oh, Father, whatever comes, keep us close to thee. We will trust thee." And when her head was lifted, her brother saw a calm, strong light in the eyes she turned to him, and he, too, was strengthened.

When they reached Vego Center her prayer had received its answer. The missing ballot box had been found, and the man who had taken it from the polling place was under arrest and had confessed his crime. Glover was innocent, as this showed.

Katie laid her head on her hands as she sat in the wagon seat, after the officer had turned away, and sent up a fervent thank-offering. Clifford sympathetically placed a hand on her folded ones, and she took it in her palms.

"Oh, Clifford!" she said, lifting her head and looking at him through eyes that sparkled with tears, "I am so glad that you didn't have to go before any court and tell that story! How we have

wronged Mr. Glover by even thinking that he could do such a thing!"

Clifford was silent, his hand still resting in his sister's.

"I suppose Glover will hear that he was suspected. Why couldn't I have kept from drawing attention to his presence! I shall see him," he said a moment later, "and tell him all there is to it. It is only fair to him, as doubtless he will hear the rumor."

Clifford had never seen a more beautiful morning than that on which he set out to visit Mr. Glover. The boisterous winds had ceased to blow, the air was sweet and cool and the sky was an arch of purest blue. Even the pony seemed to feel the inspiration of the morning, and without a word of command broke into a brisk canter.

But Clifford was not able to enjoy all this as he otherwise would have done. The dread of the coming interview with Glover shadowed his spirits. There was a prayer in his heart, though, as he rode on, and there was a satisfaction in knowing that Katie was praying for him back in the little house he had left.

He found Glover with horse saddled, ready to ride to Columbus. Though Glover knew that Clifford had approached, he did not look toward him or indicate that he was aware of the youth's presence.

Clifford's face was pale and his voice quivered as he spoke. Glover's manner

showed that he had already heard what Clifford had come to tell, and probably a garbled and incorrect account.

"I want to speak to you about my ride into town with that officer," Clifford hesitatingly began, "so that you may know the exact truth."

Glover turned on him with fierce anger.

"Not a word!" he declared. "I don't want to hear a word from you! You failed in your attempt against me, and now you want to try to explain it away."

"I was not responsible for what was done, Mr. Glover," said Clifford. "I only—"

But Glover would not hear. He swung into the saddle, pulled the head of his horse around with an impatient jerk and rode away.

"I don't wonder he rides away," explained Mrs. Glover, who had come to the door. "He is very much hurt."

"I'm sure he has a wrong idea of the whole matter, which I wanted to correct," said Clifford, with pain and regret. "I will explain it to you, if you'll let me," he anxiously continued.

She remained silent, and Clifford told her the whole story.

"Mr. Glover hadn't a thing to do with taking that ballot box!" she declared. "Nobody knows better than me that Mr. Glover has his faults; but there's one thing he wouldn't do—steal! Nor he won't cheat anybody, if he knows it. Mr.

Glover has his faults, but he tries to be honest. He was passing by Vego Center, coming from the polling place at Cameron, and he thought he'd just go get the Vego Center returns, too. He went up to the poll-room and stood a minute in the shadow, listening to the talk in the house. It ain't no more than natural, seems to me, that he should think you started the story that he stole the ballot box and returns, as long as he saw you near just as he left the place."

Clifford was glad that Mrs. Glover had been willing to listen to his explanation, and hoped that through her it would reach Mr. Glover. Nevertheless, he rode home with a feeling of depression and sadness.

The discovery of the missing ballot box and returns, and the admissions of the thief, decided the county seat contest in favor of Vego Center, though a suit, somewhat in the nature of an appeal and protest, which was not likely to change the result, was entered in the courts by the people of Columbus.

Whatever talk Mrs. Glover had with her husband concerning Clifford's statement, it did not change Glover's outward attitude. He passed Clifford without a word, whenever they chanced to meet in the road, and avoided such meetings as much as he could. Still, Clifford could not hear that Glover was engaged in any work of detraction, and for this he was sincerely thankful.



Toward the close of summer the township in which the Glovers and Kings lived was organized into a school district, and a frame building was erected for a school-house. There were in the district a number of children of school age, and it was the intention to have a school later on.

Katie King had looked forward to this time with much interest, for she hoped to secure the position of teacher. She now consulted some of her friends on the subject, and when Mrs. Kendall, the county superintendent of public instruction, came out from Garden City to look the district over, Katie accompanied her on her rounds, and spoke of her desire to many of the people.

She would have interviewed Mr. Glover at this time, but her courage was not equal to her wishes. The way he now ignored Clifford made her timid. However, she asked Mrs. Kendall to talk with him on the subject. Glover was in many ways a man of influence and commanded a considerable following, and his friendship or opposition might be sufficient to decide the question of who was to teach the school.

Katie remained at home in a state of anxiety while Mrs. Kendall was absent on her mission. When Katie saw the buggy returning she walked out along the road to meet it. Disappointment was written in Mrs. Kendall's face.

"I am sorry to tell you, dear, that he says he will do everything he can against

you," said the kind-hearted superintendent. "He says he has nothing against you, but he feels very harshly toward your brother and bases his opposition solely on that. I am so sorry! I tried to talk him out of it, but I couldn't."

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LITTLE SCHOOLMA'AM WINS.



KATIE KING was supported by so many friends in her desire to become the school teacher, that she continued her efforts to obtain the school in spite of the opposition of David Glover; and, by the advice of the county superintendent, attended the county normal school, held in Garden City in September.

She successfully passed the required examinations at the close of the normal, and was glad to return home. It seemed good to be again with Clifford in the little prairie house that had become so dear to both. Besides, religious services of more than ordinary interest were being held in Columbus and she wanted to attend them.

In all new countries people willingly go long distances to meetings of any kind, but in few new countries are long dis-



tances traveled so easily as on the prairies. There the roads are almost as smooth and firm as asphalt, when once the buffalo grass is beaten down by passing hoofs and vehicles. The round trip to Columbus was to Katie and Clifford only a delight, on those glorious moonlight nights.

The stars were brighter and more beautiful than any gems. The round moon shone like a silver disk. The clattering hoofs of the ponies, the rattle of the wheels, together with conversation and snatches of song, gave to the trips a delightful air. The settlers attended the meetings from far and near, and the gospel songs which they often sang as they rolled homeward in the glorious moonlight, sounded through the clear distances with a strange sweetness.

"I am asking for help to bear as I should the disappointment of not getting that school, if the disappointment comes," said Katie, as she and Clifford drove home one night. "Sometimes I fear I am setting my heart on it too much for my good."

With the coming of the cool, crisp mornings of October, the mirages took on a new character. Perhaps the things beheld were not really the result of mirage, but simply of a clarified atmosphere, though there were many things to make one believe them to be caused by mirage.

The most remarkable of these visions was witnessed on the morning of the third of October. Clifford and Katie

had risen early, intending to drive into Vego Center to transact some business and purchase supplies. Clifford was the first to behold it.

"Come out here, Katie!" he called, and his tone hurried her to the door.

Space seemed to have been well-nigh annihilated. The new school-house, which was two miles away, had apparently moved up within easy rifle-shot. Glover's house was as near. His stables and corrals, his sod hen-house, his unsheltered spring wagon, even the big dry-goods box he had made into a well-frame — all were distinctly visible. Buildings and haystacks miles away were brought surprisingly near; while Vego Center and Columbus, the one on the west and the other on the north, were apparently so close at hand that less than a half hour's walk would have sufficed to take Clifford to either of them. Besides all this, the hills and hollows had been smoothed out and the whole country looked as level as a table. To the westward the land rose slightly, and some squares of plowed ground and grain fields made it resemble an uptilted section map. The sight was marvellous.

"I never saw anything like it!" said Katie, after an interval of awed silence. "Is it mirage?"

The question was one that Clifford could not answer. He had never heard of mirages of this character.

"It seems to me I can almost read the

signs on those Columbus stores," he said. "Perhaps it is just the wonderful clearness of the air. It is a long drive over there, and yet one would think the distance could be walked in a few minutes."

Almost every morning for a week or more this apparent annihilation of space was witnessed. The newspapers spoke of it, and reports from various places indicated that it was to some extent at least the effect of mirage; for reputable men declared they had beheld buildings so far away that they must have been made visible by a mirage, otherwise the curvature of the earth and the intervention of well-known elevations of land would have rendered it impossible to see them, no matter how crystalline the air.

The question of who should teach the district school, the salary to be paid, and other matters, came up at a meeting called for the fifteenth, in the school-house. The school was to begin the first of November.

There was in Katie's face a heightened color which made her look very winning in Clifford's eyes, as they drove together to the meeting. Katie was always sweet, womanly and attractive. As for Clifford, he had wonderfully developed in the few months he had been on the wide prairies. The work and responsibility were hurrying him into manhood.

As they approached the wooden hitching rack that had been set in place near

the school-house, they saw Glover driving up the road with his family.

When Katie and Clifford entered the house they found it already well filled. The question of who should teach their children was rightly considered an important one by these settlers, who, whatever might be their other differences, held firmly to that grand rallying-cry of the great State of Kansas: "A school-house on every hilltop and no saloon in the valley!"

David Glover walked quietly into the room, leading his little boy by the hand. He was followed by Mrs. Glover, who was accompanied by her two little daughters. A buzz of excited talk swept through the room, and Katie King's face grew uncomfortably hot, for she was sure that much of this talk concerned her. Clifford also colored and shifted uneasily in his seat.

Promptly at two o'clock the chairman of the school-board called the meeting to order, and, to explain its purpose, read the call. The clerk pushed some papers about his desk and began his notes of the minutes.

Clifford glanced to the right, where sat Mr. and Mrs. Satterlee. Mr. Satterlee, who had made himself prominent in his new home, had promised to champion Katie's interests.

Satterlee was a very tall man, and appeared to be taller than ever as he unbent and stretched himself to his full height

in the aisle. An expectant hush followed.

"Mr. Chairman," he began, clearing his throat and clutching the seat with his muscular right hand as if the pressure gave him confidence, "I present to this meeting the name of Miss Katie King for teacher, and move you that we instruct the board to employ her to teach the first term of our school."

Instantly Glover arose, steadying himself on his short legs and thrusting one hand deep into his trousers' pocket. The silence that ensued was so great that the dropping of the proverbial pin might have been

heard. Before he spoke it grew absolutely painful.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, clearing his throat, which seemed husky, "I second the motion!"

The reaction made Katie King tremble and turn pale. This was not by any cal-

culation what she had expected. Clifford stared in amazement, almost unable to believe what he had heard. Even the chairman looked surprised, while a storm



"Mr. Chairman," he said, "I second the motion!"

of excited whispers swept through the room.

Glover sat down and the chairman rose and stated the motion. Then Glover got up again, and this is what he said:

"Mr. Chairman, a short time since I expected to oppose any motion that



might be made here to select Miss King as the teacher of our school. Instead, I stand here to support it. It is very hard for a man of my disposition to admit that he has been in the wrong, but that is what I want to do. I have discovered that Miss King's brother did not assist the officers of Vego Center in trying to fasten a crime on me, and the mirages we have had lately have shown me that I was deceived in thinking he took me to the southeast quarter of section twenty in the township north. I thought he did, because the trees on the creek looked so near that day; but last week those trees came closer down to me, far closer, than they did the day he showed me my claim, and I knew then that a mirage had fooled me at the very outset.

"I have publicly opposed the boy and his sister, and I want to make amends in a manner fully as public. Out here in this new country we ought to live honestly, and there is room enough so that we do not need to jostle one another."

Before Glover closed, Katie King was in tears and Clifford was visibly affected.

The motion to choose Miss Katie to conduct the school was carried without a dissenting vote. She was one of the first to take Glover by the hand when the meeting closed, and Clifford followed her closely in this act.

"You'll not find anybody in the district that will stand by you in your work with more willingness than I shall!" Glover declared.

David Glover kept his promise. The school was a success. The Kings never had better friends than the Glovers, nor friends they valued more. A Sunday-school was organized in the school-house. Services were also held there on Sunday mornings. Old rivalries were lost sight of, and close friendships formed. To-day church spires rise heavenward, school bells ring, white houses gleam where once the homesteader's "shack" rested, and one finds it hard to believe that this was ever the land of the mirage.

THE END.





# THE SHACK ON THE PLATEAU.

BY JOHN H. WHITSON.



R-R-R-R-R—"

Bicycle was racing against fire.

The bicycle bore a boy and a small mail-bag. The boy was

Jepthah Gwin, the youthful carrier of the star route mail.

"Parmenter is in town, I know, for I saw him just before I left!"

It was not this thought of Parmenter, however, but a thought of Parmenter's little girl, which made the young bicyclist's feet "pump" harder on the pedals.

On the top of that plateau, toward which both he and the fire were racing, was Parmenter's home, an unpretentious prairie "shack," containing Flossie Parmenter, whose age was less than twelve.

Jep Gwin had observed the smoke of the fire soon after leaving Paragon City. It was then in the west. In less than an hour it had swept across the northern horizon. Now it was climbing the grassy sand-hills.

"She'll be scared to death," was his reflection. "It's a bad fire, too. The grass is so dry it burns like shavings. And not a furrow round his house for a fire-guard! I don't know what Mr. Parmenter would think to see me on this side

trail, heading toward his house; but I'm going there, just the same."

Lewis Parmenter and the young mail-carrier were not on good terms. Not long before, Jepthah Gwin's father had tried to get Parmenter's claim by a "contest" in the United States Land Office at Paragon City, taking advantage of that provision of the land law which provides for a contest when the holder of public land does not comply with all the legal requirements. Though Gwin had failed to get the land, the incident provoked a bitter hostility against him and his family on the part of Parmenter.

So violent was this dislike that Parmenter would not speak to the boy when they met in the trail; and once, when Jepthah stopped at the Parmenter well to get a drink, being very hot and thirsty from the long run down from Pawnee Loup, Parmenter had refused him the water and angrily ordered him away.

The young mail-carrier could not help thinking of these things, as he sent the bicycle spinning over the level, lonely trail. He could think of Parmenter only as ugly and mean; and it seemed to him but a part of Parmenter's cross-grained nature that he should leave Flossie alone in the shack while he went to town,

a thing Parmenter was known to do often.

"I'm afraid the fire will beat me," he gasped, as he saw a tongue of flame leap upward and climb like a writhing red serpent to the top of the highest hill.

"It's on the plateau now!"

The hillsides over which the fire had passed were hot and smoldering; the devastated expanses below them were a blackened waste. The fire had rioted wildly through the heavier grass of the sand-hills, but now it had only the short buffalo-grass with which to feed its energies.

It was a plains fire, and not a true prairie fire. A prairie fire, fed by a growth of tall "blue-stem," gives a fire before which animals and men flee for their very lives; but a plains fire, sustained only by the short buffalo-grass, may roar and race, and still do little harm. Often it is possible to ride a horse through such a fire without more injury to the animal than a singeing of its fetlocks and legs.

Yet the fact that there was no "guard" of grassless plowed ground surrounding and protecting Parmenter's shack made the situation serious for Flossie Parmenter. The house might be ignited, or Flossie, in trying to beat the flames back from the doorway, might fire her dress and be burned to death.

When Jep had pedaled to the top of the knoll that now confronted him, he

noticed a dozen tongues of flame shooting out like red sword points, staying not a moment for the blockading effect of the narrow, grassless trail, but hurrying, as it seemed, straight for Parmenter's home.

He saw Flossie Parmenter dart out and in at the door.

"I hope she'll not try to run away from the house," was the thought and the fear that thrilled him. "If she does, the fire will get her sure."

He recalled how Jasper Kane's mother had tried to do that, the year before, and had been sadly burned. In his alarm he cried out to Flossie to remain in the house, that he was coming; but of course she did not hear him.

To gain time he turned the bicycle sharply from the trail, thus saving the long arm of an angle. Though the buffalo-grass was short and seemingly as smooth as a velvet sward, it was really hillocky, and the bicycle jumped and jarred. Nevertheless, he bent over the handle-bars and threw the whole strength of his limbs and the weight of his body upon the pedals.

"Go back! Go back!" he shouted, as he looked up and saw her again appear at the door.

He was moving much faster than the fire, but it was still a question if he would not be beaten in the race. The crackle and roar came to him quite plainly now. Tumble-weeds, big as tubs and

round as oranges, ignited and flew on before the fire, bounding balls of flame, driven by the brisk wind. Blazing resin weeds shot high into the air like burning arrows. Over all hung a cloud of pungent smoke.

He swung in front of that threatening red line and gained rapidly. As he drew near the house, Flossie saw him and ran out to meet him. Her eyes were big and bright, and she was dreadfully frightened. He set her in front of him on the bicycle.

"Is there water in the troughs?" he asked, glancing toward the motionless wind-mill.

"I — I don't know," she faltered.

"We'll soon see. I'm going to take you back to the house. You mustn't be afraid."

Then he raced on, as fast as before. He reached the house a fourth of a mile in advance of the fire; and in the short time that was left to him he dampened the sod and the boards on the side of the shack which the fire would first attack. Then the fire came down with a threatening roar, and Jephthah retreated into the flimsy building, with the child, the bicycle and mail-bag, and a pail of water.

He heard the angry crackle of the flames, and saw them, too, through the small window, as they leaped to the assault. The air grew hot and stifling.

"Don't be scared," he said encourag-

ingly to Flossie. "If the house should catch, I think I can put the fire out with this water. I don't believe, though, it will catch. You don't feel much afraid, with me here, do you?"

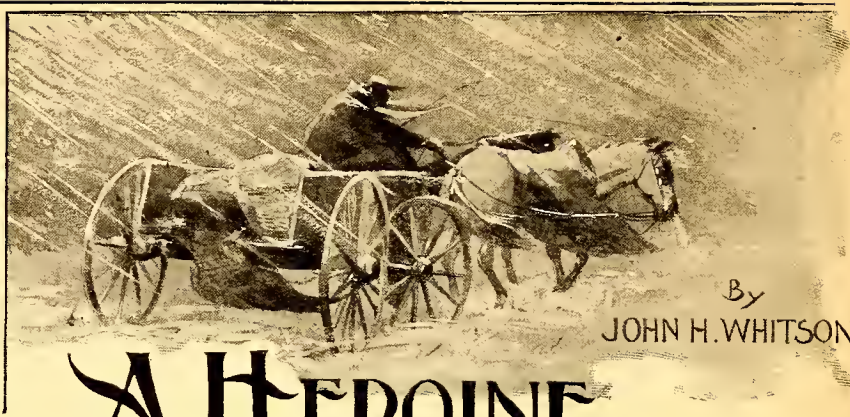
"No," she answered bravely, although there was a tearful note in her voice, and her face was white. "No, really I don't. I was scared, though, before you came. I didn't know you were such a good boy, Jep Gwin. I'm going to tell papa all about it."

Jep blushed and looked confused. He was wondering what Parmenter would say, when Flossie told him that he, Jep, was a good boy.

"I say," he exclaimed suddenly, after they had watched the fire a little longer, "I wish you'd tell your father that pa wasn't just trying to be mean when he contested his claim. We're — we're awfully hard up — and it seemed 's if pa had to take every chance he could to make a little. It wasn't just pure meanness, though I know it looks that way. Ma and I felt bad because it happened, and I'm glad enough I got here in time to help you to-day."

"I'll tell father," repeated Flossie.

She did tell him, and the result was that the neighborhood was spared the example and influence of a feud which might have wrought much evil. And that was what the combination of a kind-hearted boy and a bicycle accomplished in less than an hour's time.



By  
JOHN H. WHITSON

# A HEROINE OF THE PLAINS

“W<sup>HEW!</sup>”

Walt Dixon, coming quickly in out of the storm with a trailing rope about his waist, drew in the rope with a jerk of his mittened hand and closed the door with a bang.

“You’re nearly frozen, I know!” declared Miss Minnie, who had been waiting for him. “Hurry to the stove and I’ll help you off with your things. Are the ponies and cow all right?”

“Yes; and I got down a lot of feed for ’em. It’s warm as toast in the stable, but it’s just awful outside!”

He stamped over to the stove, shaking the snow from his shaggy coat. He drew off his mittens and warmed his hands,

while his sister untied the rope, took the disfiguring oil-cloth mask off his face, and then helped him out of the heavy coat.

A genuine blizzard was screaming across the Kansas plains. So snow-filled was the air that one could not see ten yards in any direction. It was a dry snow, fine and powdery as flour, but with almost the cutting sting of powdered glass.

The forenoon had seemed to hold the balmy promise of spring. It had been so pleasant that Minnie Dixon had taken a long gallop on her pony. Some of the farmers had even set their plows to going. Then the blue-black line, scarcely noticed at first, lifted itself high in the sky, and



the blizzard leaped out of the north with the whiz of a bolt from a crossbow.

As the storm increased in severity and the cold grew more intense, Miss Minnie had become so anxious about the comfort of the cow and the ponies that she permitted her brother to venture to the stable, with one end of a long rope tied about his waist, and the other end to the latch of the outer door, that on his return he might not miss his way.

"I'm glad now that the roof doesn't stick up any higher than it does," she said, with a nervous laugh, after helping him out of the coat. It was a man's coat and a world too big for him. "I used to feel ashamed of this little dug-out, but in such a storm it seems good to be in a cellar!"

"A dug-out is good enough for anybody, on a pre-emption," Walt declared, glancing round the interior, "and it's a lot warmer than the frame houses some of the homesteaders have put up."

Walt was rather proud of the dug-out, for it was largely the work of his own hands. He had excavated the cellar-like lower part, and had put together the upper part and the roof, of "ship-lap" boards and tarred paper, bracing the whole securely against the force of the winds by anchoring the corners to cedar posts set deeply in the ground. The inner walls he had plastered, laying the plastering on the firm dry earth, to which it readily adhered.

There was a square window in each gable, and a door facing the east, from which point comes the least wind. This door was reached by way of a horizontal door at the surface and by a short flight of earthen steps. One who has never seen a well-kept prairie dug-out will perhaps not readily believe how cozy such a house can be made, by means of white plastering, or wall-paper, pictures, books and flowers.

Miss Minnie Dixon was a teacher in the intermediate department of the Webster City schools. She was an intelligent, educated young woman, but dependent on her own resources. There was a great scramble for government land at the time, and she had taken this pre-emption of one hundred and sixty acres, a few miles out of town, and it became her home for the period of time required by the law in such cases.

In pleasant weather she drove in and out daily. At other times she boarded in town; but Walt remained at the dug-out, "baching," when his sister was away, and getting along as well as he could. However, Minnie had been at home now several days, during the midwinter vacation, which was nearing its end.

"I wish I'd gone to town this morning," she said, thoughtfully; but added, a moment later: "No, I don't, for that would have left you here in the storm alone, and I should have been worried about you."

"What was that?" asked Walt, turning his head. "I thought I heard wheels. Must have been the wind, though!"

His sister stepped to the little window in the south gable and sought to look out. The air was a white blur, which her sight could not penetrate. Then she, too, heard a sound which unmistakably was not made by the storm.

"It's something or somebody!" she declared.

Walt, who was toasting his knees by the stove, put on his cap, hurried to the door and stumbled up the dark passage. As he lifted the outer door, he thrust it against the legs of a man, whom he now dimly saw through the swirling drift. Then he heard a horse stamp, and knew that a team had been driven into the lee of the house.

"Come right in!" he said cheerily. "Awful storm, isn't it?"

The man tried to reach the steps, but stumbled, and was only saved from a fall by the strong hands of the boy.

"I'm — I'm purty well tuckered!" the man mumbled in a dull way. "I thought I was out o' the road till I — I struck your house."

Walt caught the man's arm to support him; and when they had stumbled down the passage, the inner door was opened by Miss Minnie. Not till he was in the room did Walt know that the man was Timothy Jepson, who lived on a claim two miles south.

Jepson was so chilled and benumbed he could hardly move, and when they got his wraps off they discovered that he was somewhat frozen. He wanted to get near the fire, but Miss Minnie insisted that he must not for a few minutes, and she had Walt bring snow with which to rub Mr. Jepson's hands and feet. Meanwhile, Jepson's team was taking the storm; the force of which was, however, much cut off by the upper part of the dug-out.

"I've been trying to make it home," said Jepson, in an exhausted voice. "I've coal and stuff in the wagon, and the children hain't a thing in the house. I could 'a' staid at Fairchild's — he wanted me to — but the children —"

"Are they alone?" Miss Minnie anxiously asked.

"All alone," said Jepson. "Soon's I git a bit warm I've got to push on home."

Tears came into the eyes of the kind-hearted young woman, and with the tears came a heroic resolve. The Jepson children were motherless. There were three of them, the oldest not yet ten. In fancy she saw them, hungry, freezing and terrified, in the poor, fireless, foodless "shack" rocking in the blizzard as if it would go to pieces. She saw that Jepson could not go on; that it would be suicidal for him to attempt it. He had fought the gale until his strength was gone. She even wondered if his team

could make the remainder of the journey.

Ordinarily Miss Minnie was not a courageous young woman. She had been known to scream at sight of a mouse, and to run from a prairie rattlesnake as if it were a grizzly bear, even though she had a stick in her hand with which she might easily have dispatched it. She sometimes wondered at the daring that had induced her to take the pre-emption, and could only account for it by saying that she had been made temporarily insane by the "land-fever." But now courage of a quality she had never before known was rising in her heart. She was not ignorant of the danger that flew on the blizzard's snowy wings. Not for forty pre-emptions would she have ventured out into the storm, but those poor children drew her.

"Mr. Jepson can't go," was her inward comment, "and I won't let Walt risk it, though he'd go in a minute if I'd suggest it, God bless him! But he might get lost. Oh, those poor little children!"

"I'm going to take the load on to Mr. Jepson's," she said, speaking to Walt.

He stared at her as if he could not believe it, but he saw that she was in earnest.

"You'll freeze to death!" he gasped. "You'll get lost! If it's got to be done, better let me try it!"

"No, I'm going myself. I'm quite strong, you know, and I'm older. I'll put on your coat and I'll wrap up well.

I'll not get lost if I keep close to the fence. Go out and see how Mr. Jepson's horses are. I'd rather take them, if they're all right; they're already hitched up, and our ponies might not want to go in that direction, and so might get out of the trail."

Walt hurried away to do her bidding, though he was filled with misgivings. He found that Jepson's horses were somewhat protected by blankets, but they were uneasy and evidently very cold.

"They'll do, I guess," he muttered. "It's only a pull of two miles, and they'll keep to the trail, as she said, better'n our ponies. But I'm afraid for her, though. I'm awfully afraid!"

He clawed the snow out of his eyes and tried to look down the trail that led toward Jepson's. He could see nothing but that smothering white blur, could not even see the board and wire fence of the Arkansas River Cattle Company that ran close beside the trail, though he knew that a half-dozen steps would take him to it.

"The horses 'll do," he announced, re-entering the dug-out, "but I hate awfully to have you try it, Min! I'm afraid you'll get lost, or freeze. You don't know how cold it is and how thick the snow is."

She was buttoning on some heavy leggings. Mr. Jepson had been induced by her to rest on the lounge. He was moaning from the pain of his aching

hands and feet and seemed more stupefied than when he had come in. If he heard their talk, he did not heed it.

"You do what you can to make him comfortable," she said in low tones, with a nod toward the lounge. "Don't let him leave the house. Tell him I've gone on, and that his children are all right. And don't expect me back until you see me. I shall not try to get back until after the blizzard. And you must stay right here, Walt! You will, won't you? And don't venture to the stable without the rope!"

Walt promised, then reluctantly got down the heavy coat and the blizzard mask. He also got her some wraps and her warm mittens.

She looked hardly human when she was ready for the journey. The black oil-cloth mask, the big comforter about her neck and ears, the thick badger-skin overcoat, and the "arctic" overshoes, so transformed and concealed her that her most intimate friends could not have recognized her.

"Good-by," she said, lifting her mask and kissing him, as they stood together in the tunnel between the two doors.

Then Walt lifted the outer door, that "good-by" ringing unpleasantly in his ears, and they were out in the storm. In another minute she was in the driver's seat and Walt was turning the horses. She called "good-by" as the storm swallowed her, and Walt stumbled back into

the dug-out with a foreboding ache in his heart.

No one could have known better than Minnie Dixon that she was facing death in making this attempt to reach and succor Jepson's children. The fury of a true Western blizzard is scarcely to be conceived by people accustomed only to the so-called "blizzards" of the eastern and central states; but some may get an idea of its terror by recalling the widely-published account of how, a few years ago, in a Dakota town, men with ropes tied to them to secure their safety, groped in the streets to find school children who had been overtaken by a sudden blizzard while on their way from school to their homes.

Not even the wraps and the thick badger-skin coat could wholly protect her from the icy sting of the blast. The wind tore at her sometimes as if it would snatch her from the wagon seat. She could not see the heads of the horses; could scarcely see anything. Her breath congealed at the openings in the mask until she had to dig the icy flakes away with her mittened hands. The horses floundered and stumbled. They were benumbed, and the snow was beginning to drift badly. But they seemed to advance with such confidence that her courage grew strong.

"It's only two miles," she thought. "Two miles is no distance, on the plains, and we've the storm at our backs to hurry us on."



The horses went fairly well for a time. Though they stumbled, they did not fall. Then Minnie Dixon's heart seemed to leap into her throat. She discovered that the wind, which had been at her back, was coming over her left shoulder. She tried to fancy at first that this might be caused by a bend in the trail, but when it continued she knew it was not that.

"We must be out of the trail!" she gasped. "And if we're out of it we'll never find it!"

She pulled on the lines and the horses stopped. They were obedient, though bewildered. The instinct by which a horse is said to know the way home counts for little in a blizzard.

"I must find the fence," was her thought. "It's bound to be on the right. The wind can't have changed so suddenly, and if I keep it on my right side I'm sure to strike the fence. I hope we haven't gone far from it!"

She climbed stiffly out of the high seat, got the near horse by the bit, and turned



Her knock was answered by Jepson's oldest boy.—See page 82.

the team in the direction she wanted to go, taking what she believed to be a southwest course. A due west course gave the

blizzard a broadside sweep that was unendurable.

Minnie Dixon was badly frightened before she reached the fence. It took her so long a time that she began to think that perhaps the wind had changed and she was lost. What that meant she dared not picture. No shipwrecked, drowning mariner ever put hand on buoyant spar with greater delight than that felt by her when she stumbled against the fence.

"Oh, God! I thank thee!" she murmured, from her overflowing heart.

She did not remount the seat. She was afraid to. But with one hand on a bridle bit and the other in touch with the top wire, which tore her mittens and now and then scratched her fingers, she tramped sturdily southward, in what she now confidently knew to be the right direction.

"If this fence hadn't been here!" she reflected, and the shudder that shook her was not caused by a gust of the storm.

The chill began to go out of her blood a little as she toiled on. She did not try to keep the team in the trail. She could not see the trail, because of the snow on the ground and in the air.

The way seemed dreadfully long. She was growing very tired, and was wondering how much farther she would have to go, when she heard Jepson's dog bark, and fairly stumbled against the north wall of Jepson's stable, which was built quite up to the cattle company's fence.

Feeling her way along the wall, she led the team into the lee of the stable and up to the stable door. Then she stumbled through the drifts to the house, which, fortunately, was only a few feet away, and whose direction she knew.

Her knock was answered by Jepson's oldest boy. He stared at her, wonderingly. He was in stockinged feet, but otherwise dressed. She saw he had just crawled out of bed, and looking beyond him she beheld the heads of the other children peeping above the bed clothing. They had crawled into bed because of the cold and their terror of the storm.

"If I tie a rope round your waist can you put the team in the stable?" she asked of the boy as she entered. "The horses are almost frozen, and I was afraid you would be!"

The room was fireless and icy cold.

"We'll get the horses in the stable, and then we'll have some of that coal out of the wagon and start a fire," she said.

She took off the mask and unwound the scarf from about her neck and ears. Not till then did Billy Jepson know who she was.

So severe was the blizzard that Minnie Dixon was not able to return home for three days. In fact, before she ventured to leave Jepson's, Jepson appeared, his anxiety having been so great that Walt could not detain him after the storm showed signs of abating.

"You're the grittiest and best woman

in these parts!" Jepson said to her, in his homely yet honest way. "I don't know what my little tots would 've done if you hadn't risked it. 'Twould 've been awful for 'em, with nothin' to eat and no fire!"

That was what Jepson said. The Webster City "Herald," which a week later made mention of her unselfish bravery, spoke of her as "A Heroine of the Plains."

## FROM FOREST TO PRINTING-PRESS.

BY JOHN H. WHITSON.



WID you ever consider how full of interest is the history of the paper on which these words are printed?

There was a time, not so very remote, when paper of this kind was nearly all made of rags; now it is almost wholly made of wood, chiefly spruce and poplar.

The history of paper-making, from those old, old days in Egypt when papyrus leaves were used, down to the paper-devouring present, would make an interesting article of itself. Try to think how it would be if we had no paper, and then you will gain some idea of the importance of paper to the people of this age. Without paper, there would be few books and very little learning. The leaves of the few books would be made chiefly, if not altogether, of the prepared

skins of animals. Even the Bible, as was once the case, would be so expensive that it would be only in the hands of the rich or in churches chained to the pulpits. The world would be filled with ignorance and superstition, for without books there cannot be great enlightenment.

The amount of paper used by a nation is said to be a good gauge of its intelligence. You will be glad to know that our own country, tested in this way, stands very high. There are more than a thousand paper mills in the United States, and these turn out many, many tons, for as a nation we are great paper-users.

Fortunately for the paper-making industry the forests of spruce on this continent seem almost inexhaustible. The principal area extends from upper New England to Hudson Bay. Probably more spruce comes from Maine than from any other state, and most of this comes



from the region drained by the Penobscot River.

If you will consult a good map of Maine you will see that the northern part of the state is a labyrinth of lakes and waterways. These lakes and streams are the highways down which the spruce logs are conveyed on their way to the paper mills. The logs are cut during the cold winter months, when the musical streams are still and the snow lies deep in the forests. The men who cut the logs pay the owners of the forest at an agreed rate for the standing trees. The measurement is made after the logs have been floated down, by a man who is called a "scaler." He has a rule which he places across the ends of the logs to ascertain their diameter. He knows that a log of a certain length and diameter contains a certain number of feet of lumber; and when he has made his measurements it is a simple matter of calculation to tell how many thousand feet of lumber there are in the logs.

One of the first things the loggers must do when they go into the woods to cut the logs, is to erect shelters for themselves and their teams. They select a dry spot, near water, and build a house of logs. The chinks, or crevices between the logs, they fill with dry moss, to keep out the wind and cold. Then they build a stable, called a "hovel," for the horses.

When these shelters have been prepared, a road for the teams and sleds is

cleared to the best timber, and the good trees are marked, cut down and sawed into logs, which the teams draw to the edge of the frozen lake or river. Though the weather is often very cold, there is not much wind in the depths of the woods, so the hardy loggers do not mind it. Nothing but the severest storms stop the work; and the "logging," as it is called, continues through the entire winter.

With the opening of spring, arrangements are made for floating the logs to the sea or to some point on a railway. This is called "driving," and it is at once the most exciting, perilous and romantic part of the work. No doubt you have read of the dangers of taking logs down rivers in this way, for many true tales are given us which tell of the heroism of the "river drivers" of Maine. It requires strength, endurance and courage to be a "river driver."

Owing to the length of the water highways and the fact that the work in the woods has been done by many different parties of loggers, as a matter of system and economy the streams down which logs are to be floated are divided into sections called "drives." A gang of men has charge of each "drive." The care of the descending logs in each is undertaken on contract, and is let out to the lowest bidder at an auction sale which is held in February.

The successful bidder, or contractor, then files his bond for the faithful per-



formance of the work, gets together his camp outfit and provisions, and hires his "drivers," or men. You will get a good idea of the importance of "river driving" as a business, when I tell you that last year nearly two thousand "drivers" were employed on the drives of the Penobscot and Connecticut rivers alone, and these were not half of the "river drivers" of New England.

When the snows are melting and the streams are therefore the highest, the drivers roll the logs into the water, start them on their journey, keep them going, and prevent and break "jams." Oftener than not the men are wet and cold as a result of their work, for a great deal of wading is required and "duckings" by falls in the slushy, icy water are frequent. From the camp on shore, food is conveyed to the men at work, in a boat called by the Indian name of wangen, which is pronounced "warnjen." With the coming of night the logs are allowed to take care of themselves and the men sleep at the camp, with the possible exception of a few who may be stationed at points where jams are feared.

A lonelier task than this of standing all night on the shore of some forest stream, or knee-deep in the water, watching the foam-flecked and almost invisible current, ready with a pole to push off any threatening log, can hardly be imagined. The wind moans through the tops of the tall trees, the stream roars by, the moon alter-

nately hides and reveals her face, and from the heart of the great wilderness comes perhaps the hooting of an owl or the cry of lynx and wild-cat.

A log jam is the dread of the river driver. A spruce log, which comes spinning or floating down the current, will be brought to a standstill by striking its ends against the shore or against rocks. It forms a barrier upon which other logs quickly pile. In a short time there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of logs, heaped and overlapped in confusion at this point, filling the stream from bank to bank; and to this still others are being continually added.

To break the jam it is necessary to cut or release the "key" log, the one which has stopped and now holds back the others. This is often so perilous a thing to do that the men who attempt it take their lives in their hands. Hundreds of men have lost their lives in Maine, crushed or drowned, while breaking log jams.

The one who volunteers for the work crosses the dangerous heap of shaking logs with an axe to cut the key log, or with dynamite and fuse. There is less risk in the use of dynamite, and in consequence it is now much employed, though it is destructive of logs. If the breaker of the jam is to do it by cutting through the key log, he makes a wild rush for the shore as soon as that log begins to bend and crack under the weight of the logs

pressing down on it from above. Often the break comes suddenly, for the pressure is enormous. In that event there is an avalanche of logs and the man is instantly killed. Sometimes, when the logs start, their movement hurls him from his feet, or the logs separate and drop him into the stream.

So great is the danger that one would think few men could be found to take the risk, yet there are always plenty of volunteers for the work. If dynamite is used, as soon as the fuse is lighted the jam-breaker starts on a run for the shore. The dynamite blows out the key log and the jam is broken.

The logs are transported across lakes and similar stretches of water in large rafts held together by "booms," or logs bound together. The rafts are warped along, by fastening ropes to objects ahead and drawing on the ropes, or, as in the larger lakes, they are towed by small steamers. The work is now so systematized that steamers are provided for most of the lakes, many narrow places in the rivers have been blasted and widened to prevent the formation of jams, while "booms," or barriers, have been placed in crooked places, to divert the logs and keep them from shooting out into the woods or

going ashore in marshes and at shallow points.

When the logs reach the sea, the ship landing or the railway station, they are loaded on vessels or cars and conveyed to the paper mills. Often they are bound into large rafts, which are towed by steamers to their destinations from the mouths of the rivers.

On their arrival at the paper mills the logs are first split and then chipped fine by machinery. These chips are put into tanks called "digesters," where they are treated with sulphurous acid, under heat, which destroys or eats out the cellular, resinous matter, leaving only the fiber of the wood.

This reduces the wood to a beautiful white pulp, which is washed and screened and variously treated; and which, finally, after passing through presses and drying rooms, comes out as you see it, paper.

It is sent to the big printing presses on large ribbon-like rolls, ready for the application of type and ink to make it into the object you behold, giving you, through the eyes, noble and good thoughts and beautiful pictures. Is it not a romantic and marvelous process, which thus takes a tree from a far-off forest and makes of it an engine of civilization?



# WHY THE MILLS WERE STARTED.

BY JOHN H. WHITSON.



T was said that now — will be for several months, and Amasa Stone the people are hard pressed. But I must had a heart as flinty as his keep a horde of folks in my houses free name. Certainly the people of Damariscara had never of charge. That's asking entirely too much. Those that can't pay will have to go out and let others come in that will pay. I don't see any other way to do."

witnessed any exhibition of great generosity on his part. Damariscara was a New England cotton mill town. It was not a large town, but its two cotton mills, employing five or six hundred men, women and children, produced such excellent muslin that its name was known more widely than that of many a more pretentious place. The blue stamp, "Damariscara Mills," on a piece of muslin, was everywhere accepted as a guarantee of the quality of the goods.

But the mills were now shut down, for how long no one could say. The cotton mill industry of New England was in a depressed condition. Hence the mills were idle and the mill hands out of work.

"Of course I oughtn't to expect people to make bricks without straw," Amasa Stone grumbled, as he took a turn about his office, that bright June evening. "I don't expect it, but I've got to protect myself. It's a dead loss to run the mills

He took another turn about the room. He was a tall man, rather stern, and with deep gray eyes. His hair and beard were beginning to whiten, but he was still erect and sturdy. He seemed to be, as he was, a man of strength and purpose; a man of sufficient force to become an instrument of great good or of great evil.

Amasa Stone's self-communing and the arguments he used showed that his heart was not entirely flint. One with a heart so hard does not seek to justify himself.

After a little he put on his hat and went out into the street. The lights were twinkling in the houses, the stars were shining, the air was sweet and cool. In the valley below was the tenement district, where lived the operatives, almost within the shadows of the tall smoke-stacks that towered above the mills.

"If Thorndyke hasn't the money to-

night I sha'n't wait on him any longer," was his thought, as he turned in the direction of the tenements. "That family from Androscoggin will take the house, and what's more, they'll pay the rent. Of course, I'm sorry for Thorndyke, but that's no reason I should support him. There'll be no call for him to suffer, even if he does go out of the house."

The selectmen of the town, aided by charitable people, had opened a soup house for such as were in actual need, and then there was the poor-farm for those who had no shelter. Being one of the heaviest tax-payers, Stone felt that it was largely his money that the selectmen were using and with which the county paid the expenses of the poor-farm. He told himself that, though Jack Thorndyke was a good weaver and had always met his bills when he had work, he was no more entitled to sympathy than others who had been forced to accept such charity.

"I don't want to turn him out, but if I make an exception in his case I'll have to in others, and where will it end?" Stone reflected. "I really hope he received that money he was expecting from his sister in the West, though I don't suppose he has."

He buttoned his coat about him, as he walked on in that beautiful June evening, as if he had buttoned further argument out of his heart.

The Thorndyke cottage was tiny, but

it had a home-like, cozy look. It had not been built for a tenement, but for a home, by a poor man, who had been forced to give it up. Thorndyke's wife was dead these two years now, but he still tried to keep the house as she would like it, and to keep in the yard and the windows the flowers she had loved.

One of the windows was open, and a canary — Mrs. Thorndyke's canary — cheered by the lamp, was trilling joyously, as Amasa Stone passed up the narrow, flower-bordered walk.

"For a man in Thorndyke's circumstances, that's what I call extravagance," he thought, further hardening his heart. "Why does he keep that bird? And the time he spends fooling with these flowers might bring him money, if he'd use it in work in other people's yards or gardens!"

He stopped. A child's voice had reached him, the voice of Edith Thorndyke. Stone had often seen her and admired her. She was Jake Thorndyke's only child, sweet-faced and grave-eyed — not pretty, but attractive simply because she seemed such a modest, earnest little body.

Through the open window he now saw the child, in white night robe, kneeling beside her bed. Near her Thorndyke sat on a chair.

"You haven't read any verses to-night, papa," Stone heard her say, and saw her lift her head. "I was 'bout to forget it."



She half arose, and Thorndyke, as if reproved, shifted uneasily and put out his hand for the Bible on the stand close by.

Amasa Stone could not have told why he did it, but he moved a step nearer and stood still.

"Let not your heart be troubled," read Thorndyke. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you."

Though a good weaver, Thorndyke was not a good reader. He read poorly and without inflection, but the air of the man was sincerity itself.

"Now kiss me again, papa!" said the child, lifting her face toward him; and Thorndyke, putting down the book, rose heavily from the chair and kissed her, then stood beside her as she said her prayer — "Now I lay me down to sleep," and ended with the petition, "Dear Jesus, bless papa, bless everybody. Amen."

It was only a child repeating words

that had been taught her, without perhaps fully comprehending all that the words meant, but it touched Amasa Stone as nothing had touched him in years.

He had said that prayer, without the final



Through the open window he now saw the child.—See page 88.

sentence, however, at his mother's knee, when he was a little boy.

Tears were in the eyes of Amasa Stone, whose heart many men believed to be as hard as flint.

He did not move until the child was in bed, with the covers tucked lovingly about her by her father's toil-worn hands.

Then Amasa Stone felt in his pockets,

with fingers that trembled. When they came out, they held a pencil, a little pad of paper and a ten-dollar bill. He scribbled a few words on a sheet of the paper, pinned it to the bill, and, stepping softly to the window, dropped the bill to the floor, where it was found in the morning. On the sheet of paper was written:

"Mr. Amasa Stone's present to Miss Edith Thorndyke, who prays that Jesus may bless everybody."

At a meeting of the stockholders the next day Mr. Stone astonished the other members of the association by rising in his place and saying:

"I have come to the conclusion that we are making a mistake by not running our mills, even if the times are hard and no money to be made at present; and I have

reached this conclusion by being seriously led to reflect on the condition of the mill hands. Therefore, I move you, Mr. President, that the mills be started again next Monday, for the benefit of the town, if we gain no benefit ourselves. No doubt there will be loss, but I'm sure none of us will be made much poorer because of that."

The motion was promptly seconded by Judge Hillyer, who had advocated this policy from the first; and then Amasa Stone supported his own motion in a speech which was so convincing that it carried the day.

"I was influenced by a little child," said Stone, speaking of it long afterward; "a little child that led me to see my true relations to my fellow-men, and later my true relations to God."

## THE INDIAN CADMUS.

BY JOHN H. WHITSON.



HAT rugged, exclamatory writer, Thomas Carlyle, called down "blessings on the head of Cadmus, the Phœnicians, or whoever it was that invented books."

It is well known now that neither Cadmus nor the Phœnicians "invented"

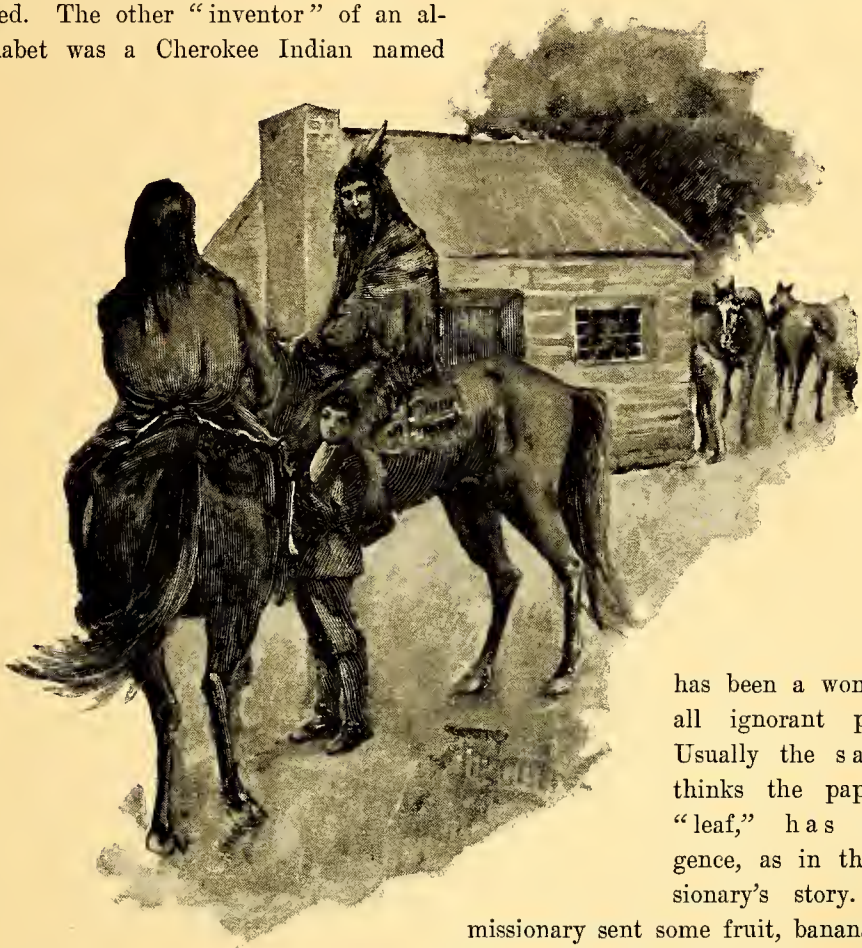
books or an alphabet; the alphabet more particularly—that is, our alphabet—"just grewed," like Topsy.

So far as known, only two men ever actually "invented" an alphabet. One of these was George Psalmanazer, a noted impostor of the last century, who claimed to have discovered a singular race of peo-

ple on the island of Formosa. To bolster his claim, Psalmanazer went to the vast trouble of inventing a language and an alphabet, which he claimed these people used. The other "inventor" of an alphabet was a Cherokee Indian named

one who thinks he can do little or nothing because of limited opportunities.

The "talking leaf" of the white man



has been a wonder of all ignorant peoples. Usually the savage thinks the paper, or "leaf," has intelligence, as in the missionary's story. The

Sequoyah, who has been called the Indian Cadmus; and the story of his remarkable achievement under great difficulty ought to be helpful and encouraging to every

missionary sent some fruit, bananas perhaps, to a relative or friend by the hand of a native, accompanying the present with a note setting forth the fact and the number of bananas sent. On the way the native ate one of the bananas, and



was astounded to find that the "talking leaf" told on him. When he was sent again with bananas and a note he sat on the note while he ate one of the bananas, thinking in that way to keep the note from seeing the theft, and was more than astounded when the note again told on him.

The white man's writing was quite as much of a mystery to that portion of the Cherokee nation residing in Alabama, in the early part of this century, with whom Sequoyah lived. One day some young Cherokees were discussing the superior intelligence of the white man, when one spoke of the white man's ability to put a "talk" on a piece of paper, send it a long distance and acquaint the receiver with what was in the sender's mind.

This was not news to Sequoyah. He had observed and deeply pondered the wonder.

"I can do the same," he jestingly declared, taking up a flat stone and scratching various marks on it.

Then he pretended to read the marks; and the thought flashed on him that here was the secret — the making of a sign for a word.

The subject took such strong hold on him that he could think of little else. He began to work on a vast alphabet which should have a sign for every word in the Cherokee language. His letters were pictorial and ideographic, not true letters, but signs and pictures represent-

ing objects and ideas. They multiplied until they became unmanageable. He soon found that there would be so many that no one could be expected to remember them. He could not remember them himself.

Though forced to admit a temporary defeat he did not despair, but gave himself even more completely to his task. He studied the sounds made in speaking and the cries of birds and animals. He neglected his farming and his work. Many of his friends thought he was crazy, or would soon become so. But none of these things, not even the old Cherokee tradition constantly dinned into his ears, could turn him from his purpose.

This tradition concerned the creation. It stated that in the beginning the Great Father made the red man and the white man, the red man first. He gave to the red man the choicest gift, a book, and to the white man a bow and arrows. The red man was not attentive to the book and the white man stole it away from him, leaving the bow and arrows in its place. The red man had thus lost his birthright, which it was impossible for him to regain.

At last Sequoyah hit on the idea which he carried to success. He discovered that words are composed of syllabic sounds and that a great many words have sounds in common. After a long time he reduced the Cherokee tongue to



eighty-five elementary sounds and invented or adopted a character for each sound.

Thus the Cherokee alphabet has eighty-five letters, instead of twenty-six, but Cherokee writing is phonetic, and for that reason much more readily learned than ours. It is seriously claimed that a bright Cherokee boy can learn to read and write his mother tongue, with Sequoyah's alphabet, in less time than a week.

Even after he had achieved this success, which he did somewhat as Milton wrote "*Paradise Lost*," with the help — sometimes the unwilling help — of the female members of his family, Sequoyah could not get a hearing from the leaders of his people, who were chained to their ignorance by that old legend. Thereupon Sequoyah left Alabama and went to another portion of the tribe, that dwelt on White River, in Arkansas. There he had better success. Still, only the inferior rank of Indians gave him heed at first and sought to acquire his wonderful art.

Does it not seem strange that all great movements begin at the bottom and work up? We are told that when the Scribes

and Pharisees rejected Jesus, "the common people heard him gladly." All earnest minds have had Sequoyah's fight and Sequoyah's faith. Nothing could daunt them. In spite of opposition and sneers, in spite of paralyzing persecution, in spite of everything, they followed the light and the truth, like Luther summoned before the Diet of Worms, though every tile on the housetops was an angry or a sneering devil. The world needs men and women, boys and girls, who believe something and are willing to make sacrifice for their belief.

Sequoyah triumphed in the end, as every sturdy toiler must do. The Cherokee legislature finally voted money for a printing press and type and the "*Cherokee Advocate*" was started. It is still run, printed one-half in Cherokee and one-half in English.

Sequoyah's invention made the Cherokees the most intelligent and the best educated of the Indian tribes. Nor is he forgotten by them. In the Cherokee capitol at Tahlequah has been placed his bust, by Vinnie Ream, to remind the beholder of what the Indian Cadmus did for his people.



# WHISTLING JOHNNY.

BY JOHN H. WHITSON.



DECLARE! that boy will make me crazy with his noise and whistling!" said Aunt Sue, lifting the egg-beater out of the frothy yellow mass in the bowl and wrinkling her usually pleasant forehead in a frown.

"I can't tell you how he tries me!"

A healthy boy of twelve or fourteen had hurried through the hall, giving the door a bang, and had gone loudly whistling across the porch.

A smile, that had a reminiscent tinge of sadness in it, came to Grandma Perkins' face.

"Do you know, I like to hear him whistle," she softly said, puckering her apron with her thin fingers. "You may be sure, for one thing, that his heart is light, and a light, care-free heart is worth having in this world. Besides, when a boy is whistling, you can know he's not into any mischief. If a boy is doing wrong he doesn't go about it so merrily."

"I believe you've taken a great fancy to Jim," observed Aunt Sue, as she recommenced whirling the egg-beater.

The tone was almost as gentle as grandma's. Perhaps that was because

grandma's wistful manner and soft voice had called up a vision of Jim's mother just as she was in the long ago, when, as sisters, she and Aunt Sue had come up to young womanhood together, with the sunlight of gladness and the beauty of pure hearts and good health in their faces. Jim's mother had gone but a little distance on the pathway of life before she wearied and gave up its burden, leaving to other hands the task of rearing and training her baby boy.

"He makes me think of Johnny Lathrop," grandma musingly continued. (Grandma Perkins was everybody's grandma, and always the gentle defender of the boys and girls wherever she went.) "We called him Whistling Johnny. Everybody called him that. And if ever a name fitted anybody, that fitted him. He whistled continually, at work and at play. And he could whistle like a bird. It was a pleasure to me just to listen to him, for when he puckered his lips and began to whistle, real music came out. I remember when he forgot and began to whistle in school, one time. Of course the scholars all laughed, and he received a reprimand. His mother told that she once heard him whistling in the night, and she was sure he did it while he was

dreaming. Ah, me!" sighed grandma, while the wistful light deepened in her sweet brown eyes. "That was a long, long time ago, though it doesn't really seem it!"

Aunt Sue stopped her egg-beating to inspect a pie in the oven.

"I didn't ever think, then, how glad I'd be to hear that whistle, some day," grandma continued, after it seemed she was going to leave the story unfinished and wander off into a reminiscent day dream. "No, that I didn't. I'd been down on the ridge, picking blackberries, that day. Seems to me I can see and taste those berries and feel the scratches of the vines yet. I suppose the reason I remember everything so distinctly is because of the accident, and because of the little green snake lying on the briars, that I almost put my hand on before I saw it.

"Well, that startled me a good deal, and I decided that I wouldn't pick any more berries there, but would go over to an old house, where there was a well, and eat my dinner. I had my dinner in a little tin pail, that I intended to fill with berries when I had emptied it of food.

"So I walked across the field, letting my sunbonnet swing at the back of my neck by its strings, for my face and head were hot and I wanted to get all the good I could of the breeze. It was about noon, I thought, by the looks of the sun.

Everything was very still, with the exception of the locusts that were making a noise in the tree-tops.

"No one had lived in the house for some time. The front door was off its hinges and lying in the weedy yard. I put my dinner and my berry pail down on this door and hurried to the well to draw some water, for I was very thirsty, as well as warm. I don't know just how it happened, but when I reached up to take hold of the pole of the old-fashioned well-sweep, I slipped and fell into the well." Grandma closed her eyes, as that old fright came on her again.

"You must have been dreadfully hurt, or nearly drowned?" questioned Aunt Sue, lifting the egg-beater.

"No, I wasn't hurt a bit, but you may be sure I was dreadfully scared. Fortunately, the well wasn't very deep, and I went down feet foremost. I fully expected to drown; but when I scrambled up, almost scared to death, I found that the water only rose to a little above my knees. It was cold, though, almost icy cold, and I began to chill and my teeth to chatter at once. I didn't know what to do but to call for help, and I called till I could hardly stand. I should have died there, I suppose, if Whistling Johnny hadn't come along. He was on his way to the berry patch, and of course he was whistling. As soon as I heard him I began to shout and scream again. The whistling stopped, so I knew he heard

mc. I kept on calling, and finally, clinging tremblingly to the little pole that served as the bucket rope. I told him I was ready, though I still hardly understood his plan. Then the little pole, to which I clung, jarred again. He was hitching back along the high arm of the sweep. He was forced to hitch to its extreme end before his weight was sufficient to lift me. Then the bucket began to rise. 'She's comin'!' I heard him screech; and then he began to whistle again, as his end of the long sweep went down and mine went up. It did not take me long to reach the top of the well, wet and chilled, but safe and sound. I scrambled out of the bucket as quick as I could, letting Johnny's end of the sweep go 'chug' to the ground. But as the drop was only a foot or so, the fall did not hurt him. 'Worked it slick as a whistle!' he said, exultantly. And then, as if that made him recollect something he'd forgotten, he puckered his lips and became again Whistling Johnny.

"Do you suppose you could get me out, Johnny?" I asked. "I shall die in here, if you don't, or if you can't bring me help soon. You couldn't pull me out with the sweep, could you?"

"Johnny looked at me and at the sweep, then scratched his head. 'I tell you what,' he said, 'I can try.'

"I didn't know, then, the plan that had popped into his mind, and though I was so anxious for him to try, I really doubted his ability, with all the help I could give him, for you see he was only a boy, though heavy and strong for his years. He began to whistle, and the next minute he sent down the bucket. 'Get into that,' he called, 'while I shin up the big pole. And be sure you hold on good and tight when she begins to lift, and don't you wiggle round any.' Then he ran away, and I felt the jar, as he began to climb the big pole to the fork in which the sweep rested. The long arm of the sweep was pivoted in that fork, you know, so that its ends would move up and down like a see-saw. A minute or so later he called: 'All ready! Are you all ready?' I was in the bucket and doing it."











